

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS: THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION,
1789-1827

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Abstract

The French Revolution has long been recognised as the crucial turning point in modern European history. The event is often cited as the beginning point for European Romanticism. Helen Maria Williams occupied a unique position at the crucible of events in post-revolutionary Paris. Having visited the capital in 1790 to attend the *Fête de la Fédération* on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, she was to spend the rest of her life endeavouring to communicate the originating ideals which she had first encountered there. Returning to France in 1791, she was naturalised as French in 1817 and remained in Paris until her death in 1827. Renowned for her poetry and most famously for the extensive body of political reportage contained in the 8 volumes of her *Letters from France*, Williams was also a translator, an aspect of her corpus which has been largely overlooked in academic research. It is in the collection of translations in which she finds her most Romantic expression. In the translations produced from Paris, Williams experiments with progressive European thought, both philosophically and linguistically, working towards a political and literary universalism influenced by contemporary French culture and by German thought arriving in France from members of the pre-unification states. As a successful salonnière, Williams became acquainted with many of the period's leading figures, absorbing and reinterpreting spheres of influence in her translations. Literary translations, such as *Paul and Virginia* and *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, reside among the more prosaic works such as *The Confidential and Political Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth* to form a body of work which reveals Williams's idiosyncratic practices and, most readily in the paratextual material of her many prefaces, her ideas as to the purpose of translation.

The idea of liminality is fundamental to our understanding of Williams's life and work. Occupying the mysterious middle-ground, Williams resides in the space between nations, between cultures, languages, literary movements and historical-temporal thresholds. From this position she operates as mediator, not only of French literature, but of socio-political realities. Throughout her time in France she remained convinced of the truth of the originating revolutionist ideals she had first encountered in 1790 and she strived always to mediate and to re-inscribe, indeed to translate the French Revolution of 1789. The translations of Helen Maria Williams serve as the appropriate locus from which to suggest a reconfiguration of her importance in the canon of Romantic women writers and translators.

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Chapter 1

Romantic Mediator: Helen Maria Williams Found in Translation

Literature is the gateway through which we travel into hitherto unknown realms of the imagination. We are, however, restricted in our adventures by the borders of our cultural-linguistic horizons. The continuation of our literary voyages across socio-political divides is enabled by the mystery of translation. The Romantic period saw the development of much of the theory of translation which attempted to analyse and to reinvigorate the discourse concerning translational function and purpose. The importance of translation to the intertextualities of European Romanticism at play in the epoch surrounding the French Revolution of 1789 should not be overlooked. As a long-term resident of France with ties to politicians and thinkers from across Europe, Helen Maria Williams was a proponent of translation as a means of circulating a progressive political ideal and of challenging ideological orthodoxies and her work in the genre remains testament to its power.

‘Translation’, asserts Peter Ackroyd, ‘can be a kind of liberation, releasing an older work into the contemporary world and thereby infusing it with new life.’¹ The idea, resonating with echoes of Walter Benjamin’s notion of a textual afterlife, speaks directly to the regenerative relationship between texts over time and across cultures. In historicising Helen Maria Williams, the statement offers a broader interpretive nexus. Williams found personal and political liberation following her emigration to France, with translation (both literary and, more broadly, cultural transfer), providing her with the artistic and psychological freedom with which to explore and publish her formulation of the Revolution of 1789.

Writing of the Enlightenment as a ‘pan-European movement genuinely striving to create and further discursive relations’, Stefanie Stockhorst argues that in its intention to override

¹ Peter Ackroyd, trans., *The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. xix.

national and language barriers, ‘guided by cosmopolitan and universalist interests, [the Enlightenment project] inherently possessed a dimension of transfer.’² The same concerns guided Williams and, as a unified conception, she *inherently possessed* and mediated cultural transfers throughout her time in France. Stockhorst takes her model of the term *cultural transfer* from Michel Espagne and Michael Werner’s definition of information exchange and representation through networks, which, for Stockhorst ‘accurately characterises the situation of intellectual life in the eighteenth century.’³ The idea is that transfer and transformation are stimulated not only by textual and linguistic exchange, but by the dynamic interaction of individuals in interactive socio-cultural milieus. In 2010, as a result of shifting emphasis in Translation Studies and Comparative Literature Manuela Rossini and Michael Toggweiler broadened the concept towards a more holistic understanding of European cultural relationships, characterising their conception of cultural transfer as ‘the global mobility of words, concepts, images, persons, animals, commodities, money, weapons, and other things.’⁴ Perfectly encompassing aspects of Williams’s literary-social existence, thus we can characterise her as acting in her own network of transferral and interconnectivity.

Academic discussion concerned with Williams has tended hitherto to centre on the body of Revolutionary reportage, for which she is most well-known, and on the corpus of her poetry. Williams’s work in translation is often treated as a footnote to her literary career, the work dismissed as merely the means by which she made her living in Paris, with little further comment made. However, detailed analysis of Williams’s translational oeuvre reveals that it was, in fact, pivotal to her self-contextualisation and, more importantly, to her life’s work: the

² Stephanie Stockhorst, ‘Introduction: Cultural Transfer through Translation: A Current Perspective in Enlightenment Studies’ in *Cultural Transfer through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, ed by Stephanie Stockhorst (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), p. 7

³ Stockhorst, p. 7. For more on Espagne and Werner’s definition see *Transferts. Les relations interculturelle dans l’espace franco-allemande (XVIII-XIX siècle)*, ed by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (Paris; Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988).

⁴ Manuela Rossini and Michael Toggweiler, ‘Cultural Transfer: An Introduction’ in ‘Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics’, 4.2 Dec 2014 (Bucharest: Universitatea Petrol-Gaze din Ploiesti, 2014) 5-9, p. 5.

communication of a pro-revolutionist idealism born of her witnessing the *Fête de la Fédération* on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. The thesis which follows suggests liberating Williams from previous categorisations and infusing Williams scholarship with new life by asserting that translation is the most important constituent in her canon and that, furthermore, it is in translation that she finds her most Romantic field of expression.

The three questions with which this study is concerned are:

- 1) How does translation function as both creative agency of interpretation of the French Revolution of 1789 and of French literature in the post-revolutionary and Napoleonic eras?
- 2) How are the works of Helen Maria Williams in Anglo-French translation situated within this literary-philosophical context?
- 3) How does the work of Williams contribute to the emergent European discourse concerning translation theory developing in the 1790s and on into the beginning of the nineteenth century?

Sartre asked, 'Pourquoi écrire?', 'why write?' (Fr.).⁵ The question pertains here. Stephen C.

Behrendt gives a succinct account of the problem at hand, stating that:

Several decades of scholarship and numerous waves of theory have brought us to the present moment in which a wholesale reassessment of 'British Romanticism' is occurring, as scholars, teachers and students rethink a literary and cultural 'movement' that was for nearly two centuries stereotyped in terms of a small group of male poets.⁶

The consequences of the exclusive emphasis on, and over-refinement of, the 'big six': Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, was the, historically, restrictive paradigm

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 8.

⁶ Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), pp. 1-2.

of Romantic analysis. Behrendt's judgement of the spirit of the current age is sound, as a wealth of publication and conference programs of both The British Association of Romantic Scholars (BARS) and The North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) in recent years attest. However, in his summary of contemporary trends Behrendt misses a vital constituent: the genre of translation, an area of fundamental importance to the continuous regeneration of Romanticism and the reimagining of Romantic Europe.

Isaiah Berlin claimed the Romantic period as the seminal epoch from which modern European political thought had emerged and it is now commonly agreed that the period surrounding the French revolution of 1789 marks the birth of modern Europe.⁷ Despite the obvious significance of inter-linguistic and cultural exchange in the period, works of individual translators have largely been overlooked by a century's-worth of scholarship. As Susanne Schmid states, 'the centrality of translation to European Romanticism is undisputed. Through their reading and writing individuals connected across linguistic and national boundaries, in fact, even across centuries.'⁸ Works by European Romantic translators have been, perhaps, the most neglected of the hidden generic treasures and the growing interest in the field is fuelled by the literary-philosophical considerations revealed by their excavation speaking to a generation of scholars across time.

Translation has suffered from historical neglect. Derrida once claimed that he had, 'shunned the translator's metier, his beautiful and terrifying responsibility, his insolvent duty and debt.'⁹ In academic and non-academic circles, translation has been treated thus, retaining a marginal interest and often seen as little more than an exercise in manual transcription, a secondary activity in the binary relationship between *soi-disant* original works and their

⁷ Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006).

⁸ Susanne Schmid, 'Introduction: Romanticism, Reading and Translation: The Process of Literacy', *Wordsworth Circle*, 39:3, (2008), 67-8, p. 67.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, 1999, 'What is "Relevant" Translation?', ('Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction "relevante?")', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed by Laurence Venuti (London; NY: Routledge, 2004) p. 423.

reimagined counterparts. Such attitudes are, however, undergoing a reconfiguration through the examination of translated texts and through the analysis of theoretical and paratextual material. Recent developments are leading to Derrida's discovered, 'admiration for those men and women [...], the only ones who know how to read and write – translators.'¹⁰ Much of a similar admiration has been accorded to Williams, in large part following the publication of the Deborah Kennedy's superlative biography, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (2002). This research takes its impetus, in part, from Behrendt's exhortation to continue the excavation of buried women's writing and Lori Chamberlain's call for us to learn to 'listen to the "silent" discourse — of women, as translators.'¹¹ As a translator, Williams's voice has been little-heard and there remains, therefore, work to be done in examining this aspect of her corpus towards a deeper understanding of her life and work.

Helen Maria Williams believed in the transformative possibility of translation. She translated literary artefacts and socio-political thought. Her progressive movement towards France from England was driven by her inclination towards the discovery and comprehension of alterity and its potential. As a result, Williams was often viewed with suspicion by domestic authorities on both sides of the channel. The unconventional nature of her relationship with John Hurford Stone is an example of her willingness to tread the path less travelled. The couple were criticised for their trip to Switzerland in 1793, for example, as Stone, though separated, was still married and their unorthodox relationship was always perceived as suspicious. In creative translations, such as *Paul and Virginia* and the *Leper of the City of Aoste*, Williams was equally adventurous, fluctuating between faithful and liberal renderings, never fully adhering to gendered conceptions of either the task of the translator: servility to a dominant original, or obeisance to the strictures of translatorial convention. Such was her

¹⁰ Derrida, in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 423-4.

¹¹ Lori Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation', in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 318.

relationship to the ‘natural law’ of female inferiority in literary terms. Williams, as long-term resident of France through the revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Restoration eras was present at a cataclysmic new beginning and defined herself as its foremost translator and communicator. Her lifelong project was the translation of the universalism and communality of purpose she had felt at her comprehension of originating revolutionary ideas. As the personification of the third stage of Josephine Grieder’s model of *Anglomania*, that of naturalisation, Williams was a figure of liminality in the duality of identity.¹² She resided at thresholds, meeting points. Present in the crucible of European self-definition, she was also witness and contributor to the emergence of a modern European translation discourse. She was a successful poet of sensibility in England who went on to become a pre-eminent historian and political writer of the 1789 Revolution and of life in Napoleonic and Restoration France. She travelled across and between the boundaries of nation and culture, consistent with historical conceptions of the translator as traveller. Geographically, nationally, intellectually and metaphysically, Williams was always engaged in this type of journey. Her work in translation perfectly embodies these notions.

During her stay in Paris, Williams found expression for her experimentation with the literary-cultural complexities of her own liminal subject position through work in translation, work closely aligned with her more fully developed literary and historical-critical output. Angela Keane has recently questioned Williams’s status as a Romantic writer, *per se*. ‘In the work of Helen Maria Williams,’ Keane suggests, ‘there is an explicit and polite distance between authorial subject and textual performance, a distance that makes her a less likely candidate for inclusion in the Romantic canon.’¹³ Keane considers Williams less a Romantic figure than as a sentimental writer belonging to a category from a previous era. Her expression is not

¹² For more on the phenomenon of *l’Anglomanie*, or *Anglomania* see Josephine Grieder, *Anglomania in France: Fact, Fiction and Political Discourse* (Geneva: Droz, 1985).

¹³ Angela Keane, *Revolutionary Women Writers: Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2013), p. 3

sufficiently confessional or self-examinatory to warrant the designation Romantic in the same rank as Charlotte Smith, for example. It is my conjecture that Williams belongs in the Romantic canon because of the experimental expressions of often paradoxical and mysterious networks of thought and language contained in the body of translations. It is through her creativity in translation that Williams asserts her authorial voice, (re)generating original works into far more than pale transcriptions.

According to Keane, ‘to come to terms with Williams’ writing, one must not confuse the sentimental with the confessional, the first-person voice with the autobiographical subject.’¹⁴ Perhaps not in the case of her poetry, but in the translations and in the political *Letters* Williams is always present. She is always writing, in the paratextual material to the translations for example, not only her autobiography but also the biography of the revolution (in the case of the paratextual material of her prefaces not without a degree of elaborate, if not theatrical, performance). Moreover, it is indeed the difference presented in the corpus of translations which marks her out as Romantic. We must look beyond the poetry towards the historical reportage and then to the translations, in order to fully understand Williams as a Romantic writer. Explaining his multifarious notion of *traductologie*, Antoine Berman argued that translation should not ‘become an object of specific “discipline” concerning a separate “region” or “domain,” precisely because it is not anything separate itself.’¹⁵ Accordingly, we cannot entirely separate Williams’s translations as a discrete genre, but see them as vital constituents of her romantic expression, sending and receiving influences from her work and that of her contemporaries. According to Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser, Williams ‘gives us a rare opportunity to see how literature, politics, gender, and history may come together in

¹⁴ Keane, p. 130

¹⁵ Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. by S. Hayvaert (New York: State University of New York, 1992), p. 182

the production of a distinct and daring Romantic voice.’¹⁶ As a spectrum of influence, Williams projects a unique voice, speaking through translation through and across socio-political boundaries.

In several works, Derrida claimed variations on his theme that translation is ‘impossible et nécessaire’, ‘impossible and necessary’ (Fr.) and the venture does indeed present itself as philosophically impossible.¹⁷ Yet, it remains absolutely necessary. An intelligent and courageous writer, Williams was always prepared to wrestle with the paradoxes of this seemingly intractable venture. Oft-cited originator of modern translation theory, Friedrich Schleiermacher, questioned whether or not translation was, in fact, ‘ein törichtes Unternehmen’, a ‘foolish undertaking’ (Gr.).¹⁸ Far from it. It is a complex and vital operation, one which, according to Lori Chamberlain, ‘can expand both literary and political borders.’¹⁹ According to Chamberlain, ‘to claim that translating is like writing [...] is to make it a creative – rather than merely re-creative – activity. But the claims for originality and authority, made in reference to acts of artistic and biological creation, exist in sharp contrast to the place of translation in a literary or economic hierarchy.’²⁰ Not simply an exercise in mechanistic transcription, translation is, as it was for Williams, important work. It is a creative and complex venture, one which reveals secrets regarding language, philosophy, art,

¹⁶ Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France, In the Summer of 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution by Helen Maria Williams* (Ormskirk: Broadview, 2001), p. 50. The work will henceforth be referred to in the text and in notes as *Letters Written in France 1790*.

¹⁷ For example, see Jacques Derrida, ‘Des Tours de Babel’, trans. Joseph F. Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, ed by Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp 165-248.

¹⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, ‘Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens’. ‘On the Different Methods of Translating.’ in, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Zur Philosophie* 9 vols (Berlin: G. Reiner, 1835-46). Vol. 2, p. 216.

¹⁹ Chamberlain, in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 310

²⁰ Chamberlain, in Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 315.

identity, and gender politics.²¹ David Bellos goes so far as to suggest that, ‘translation is another name for the human condition.’²² Williams may have agreed.

In ‘An Epistle to Doctor Moore’, published in *Poems* (1786), Williams writes of the transformative power of literature and, in particular, of literary translation. Referring to her experience of Virgil as mediated by Dryden, Williams offers the following:

Tho’ hid from me the classic tongue,
In which his heav’nly strain was strung
In *Dryden’s* tuneful lines, I pierce
The shaded beauties of his verse.²³

Translation is the means by which we are granted access to recondite facets of literary experience, with the translator, Dryden in this case, positioned as the privileged gatekeeper, a favoured being in a Wordsworthian sense. The translator is (again with echoes of Wordsworth) the guardian and guide, a trope which recurs later in Keats’s *On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer* in which Keats records never having ‘breathe[d] its pure serene’, until he had, ‘heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.’²⁴ The suggestion persists that it is the translator’s voice which resonates greatest, an idea fundamental to Williams’s conception of subjective interpretation and creative reimagination. Her voice, often loud and bold, reverberates with authorial self-definition, but at the same time conceals itself or rather harmonises with the pre-existing voice. Much did Williams travel in the ‘realms of gold’ of Revolutionary Paris all the while eager to speak of the unseen aspects of European politics

²¹ For more on translation as a creative process in women’s literature see *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators: Women Writers, 1700-1900*, ed by Gillian Dow (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007)

²² David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: The Amazing Adventure of Translation* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 338.

²³ Helen Maria Williams, ‘An Epistle to Dr. Moore, Author of a View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany’, in *Poems by Helen Maria Williams in Two Volumes*, 2nd ed (London: T. Cadell, 1791), vol. I, p. 49.

²⁴ Keats, *On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer*, in *John Keats: Selected Poetry*, ed John Barnard (London: Penguin, 1988) p. 1

and literature.²⁵ Translation was for her a creative act. The translator was the creative voice, constrained by the obviation of origination but able to speak of hidden truths. The paradox of occupying multi-dimensional space and as a corollary, the expression of, and from, objective and subjective positions is the source and the realisation of creation. The state of flux is key to the Romantic self-definition, from Williams through Wordsworth to Keats. It is in translation where Williams finds her Romanticism.

Born on June 17 1759, Helen Maria Williams had secured literary renown in London. Having achieved success with the publication of the poem, *Edwin and Eltruda* in 1782, followed by *An Ode on the Peace* (1783), celebrating the end of the American Revolution, and the epic, *Peru* (1784), her reputation as a foremost poet of sensibility was secured with the publication of *Poems* (1786), the first 56 pages of which work comprises a list of subscribers, a list some 170 names long and containing many notable literary and political figures. Williams's only novel, *Julia*, a reworking of Rousseau's *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, appeared in 1790.

Louise Joy has argued that Williams, in this work, redefines the heroine by transposing her emotional exteriority from French to English modes of expression, creating a 'consistent and unambiguous unity between Julia's internal feelings and her external emotions,' and endowing her with 'an integrity she implies is lacking in the protagonist of the French novel.'²⁶ This became Williams's practice throughout her life in France, translating her nebulous psychological interiority into unified external expression. The novel is also remarkable for the inclusion of a poem on the fall of the Bastille. The interpolation of extratextual. political material in this way points forwards to the self-imposition of Williams through the various sonnets found throughout the translation of Bernardin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (translated by Williams as *Paul and Virginia*), as does the interpretation of

²⁵ Keats, in Barnard, p. 1.

²⁶ Louise Joy, 'Emotions in Translation: Helen Maria Williams and "Beauties Peculiar to the English Language"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 50:1, (2011), 145-171 (p. 1).

Rousseau, a defining trope of the Bernardin's original novel and of Williams's translation, as Laura Kirkley has shown.²⁷

Just as the French Revolution of 1789 is widely regarded as representing the cataclysmic birth of European Romanticism, so it was for Williams the event which altered the course of her life and would forever thereafter define and influence her work. Williams's second life, in Benjaminian terms, her afterlife, really began when she first visited Paris in 1790 to witness the *Fête de la Fédération*, the huge city-wide celebrations to mark the fall of the Bastille in the previous year.²⁸ Despite returning briefly to London, in September 1791 she crossed a threshold from which she was never to return.²⁹ Emigrating fully in 1792, she was installed in Paris to where, after a stay in the Netherlands at the end of her (second) life, she returned and remained until her death in 1827.

Fraught and often turbulent, the years following her move to Paris were highly dangerous and always politically charged. As a successful salonnière, Williams counted among her friends J. P. Brissot and several Brissotin sympathisers, known later as Girondins, including Madame Roland. Many of her friends were to be arrested, imprisoned and executed under Robespierre's authority during the Reign of Terror (1793-4). Witness to the corruption by the Committee for Public Safety of the revolutionary ideals she so cherished, Williams felt the power of the 'great incorruptible', Robespierre, at first-hand. In October 1793, subsequent to an edict calling for the arrest of all British subjects, Williams and several members of her family were imprisoned for six weeks. Following her release, her situation became

²⁷ See Laura Kirkley, 'Translating Rousseauism: Transformations of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* in the works of Helen Maria Williams and Maria Edgeworth', in *Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900*, ed by Gillian Dow (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

²⁸ Walter Benjamin's much anthologised essay, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' first appeared in 1923, as the preface to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*. It was translated by Harry Zohn in 1968 as 'The Task of the Translator.' Zohn's has become the standard version, the most frequently anthologised in the literature of Translation Studies. For more on Benjamin's notion of a textual afterlife, see 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', trans. by Harry Zohn in Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 75-83.

²⁹ Williams published the poem, *A Farewell, for Two Years, to England* in May 1791 before her departure in July of the same year. In fact, she returned briefly to England in 1792, but remained in France from then on.

increasingly precarious. She fled to Switzerland in July 1794, travelling across the country for six months. She later published the *Tour of Switzerland* in 1798.

As well as the attentions of Robespierre, Williams later managed to arouse a characteristically dangerous interest from Napoleon. Initially enthusiastic at the rise of Bonaparte and supportive of his pro-revolutionary policies, she became increasingly disillusioned and, in a *volte face* with echoes of Beethoven, removed the emperor's name from her 'Ode to Peace' (1801).³⁰ A deliberate omission, all reference to Napoleon was removed by Williams in order, according to Kennedy, 'to test his vanity.'³¹ The result was soon proved, with her salon becoming the focus of police surveillance on Bonaparte's orders, her house was searched and she was held in custody for twenty-four hours. She recorded the incident in the Preface to her, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1823), stating that, on discovering the Ode 'in a corner of the Morning Chronicle', Napoleon had:

[P]retended to be highly irritated at the expression "encircled by thy subject-waves," applied to England, and which he said was treasonable towards France; but what he really resented was, that his name was not pronounced in the Ode. However singular it may seem that he should have paid the slightest attention to such a circumstance, it is nevertheless true. The ambitious find time for every thing [*Sic.*], and while they appear to be wholly absorbed by great objects, never lose sight of the most minute if connected with their own egotism.³²

Having firmly secured Bonaparte's ire, she was later hounded throughout the project of her translating and editing the collection, *The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth* (1803), the sale of which was banned in 1803. The 1823 *Poems* contains

³⁰ Following Napoleon's self-coronation in 1804, Beethoven is said to have struck the name of the original dedicatee (Napoleon) from his 3rd symphony, later known as the *Eroica*. David Swafford has suggested that, in fact, the words 'written on Bonaparte' remained on the manuscript. Nonetheless, the title was removed and the symphony was never entitled Bonaparte as planned. See David Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).

³¹ Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (Cranberry, NJ; London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 178.

³² Williams, *Poems on Various Subjects, with Introductory Remarks on the Present State of Science and Literature in France* (Davis, CA: University of California, 2000), p. xiii.

<<http://digital.lib.ucdavis.edu/projects/bwrp/Works/WillHPoems.htm> p. xxiii> [accessed 7 December 2015]

an appended note which responds to certain of Napoleon's criticisms and the 1815 *Narrative* chronicles, according to Fraistat and Lanser, 'her disillusionment with Napoleon, piling up so many grievances, including his treatment of women, that with no apparent consciousness of irony she is able to hail the Bourbon Restoration as a return of happiness to France.'³³ Her reception was no less ambivalent. Conservatives continuously railed at her support for Revolutionist principles whilst 'liberal thinkers recalled her as an influential interpreter of politics and history.'³⁴ As a cultural and socio-political interpreter, Williams the gatekeeper (to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu), called forth 'intensely divergent responses.'³⁵

Paris was also where she began her literary afterlife. Her career in translation began in 1795 with the publication of her translation of Bernardin's *Paul et Virginie* as *Paul and Virginia*.³⁶ Aside from the reinterpretation of Rousseau in *Julia*, the novel was Williams's first foray into literary translation from French and is an early indication of her experimental and creative style. Most interesting, here, is the imposition of herself into the story in the form of her poetry and the preface which details the difficult circumstances under which the translation was conducted. Viewing the entry into Bernardin's idyll as an escape from contemporary troubles in Robespierre's Paris, Williams knew that translation could provide the mode in which she might travel between and through worlds, both physical and psychological, and, furthermore, she could prove a worthy guide to her readership, providing insights into the 'shaded beauties' to which she had earlier alluded. Remarkable in style and informative as to Williams's theoretical thinking, the work is also noteworthy as being the work in translation which marks the beginning of the process of translating the Revolution in literature as a larger purpose, combining with the more prosaic, socio-historical material. As a self-

³³ Fraistat and Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 29.

³⁴ Fraistat and Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 29.

³⁵ Fraistat and Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France 1790* p. 29.

³⁶ First published in 1788 as part of Bernardin's *Études de la Nature*, the novel first appeared separately in an authorised version in 1789.

confessed acolyte of Rousseau, Bernardin had interpreted Rousseauvian notions and created a work which portrayed the possibility of a natural education and communal living whilst questioning and challenging the conventions and mores of the *Ancien Régime*. As a friend of Bernardin, Williams was no doubt aware of the political intent in his writing and of the novel's pedigree in terms of a lineage to Rousseau. The translation therefore becomes an important first in several ways marking, as it does, the beginning of Williams's literary translation career and the commencement of her Revolutionary translational project.

Following her success with *Paul and Virginia*, Williams's instinctive ambition to (re)inscribe the story of the Revolution, drove her to undertaking her most overtly political work outside of the political reportage of the *Letters*: a translation of what she believed to be the private correspondence of Louis XVI.³⁷ Mounting a revolutionary defence, not dissimilar (though less violent in tone and in content) to Wordsworth's *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (not published until 1876), Williams, particularly in the paratextual material of her appended notes, attempted to naturalise the course of history from 1789. Paraphrasing Milton, she wanted to explain the ways of, not only the King as counterfeit God, but more appropriately the revolution and revolutionary authority as divine conception to men. A foolish undertaking, to invoke Schleiermacher once more, perhaps, particularly in light of the controversy which attended the work and the deleterious effect on Williams's career. The book proved something of a dangerous albatross. When he received word of its production, Napoleon surveilled the project closely and confiscated the entire edition in July 1803, an expensive seizure for Williams, causing financial damage and threatening her reputation. On publication, critics attacked her as an audacious interloper and were quick to seize upon the work as an indictment of Williams's misplaced sympathies and misrepresentation of the

³⁷ *The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis XVI with Observations on each Letter*, 3 vols (London: G and J Robinson, 1803). The work will henceforth be referred to in the text as *The Correspondence*.

facts. The royalist A. F. Bertrand de Moleville, published a scathing and influential book-length critique in 1804, in which he dismissed her revolutionary idealism, translation and linguistic skills, but more damningly her knowledge of France and of French politics.³⁸ The controversy continued and worse was to come when, after several years of public conjecture as to the letters' provenance, it was discovered that they had indeed been forgeries. Following the disasters attendant on the work, Williams's resolve was severely damaged. Napoleon had made it clear that she was considered dangerous and worthy of his constant surveillance. Ever the pragmatist, Williams decided to forego the potential perils of her subversive expression, preferring not to antagonise Bonaparte in order to secure her safe residence in France. Realising that anything she now wrote would be instantly subjected to censorship at the very least she disappeared into a self-imposed retirement publishing virtually nothing over the next eleven years until after Bonaparte's final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Post-Napoleonic commentary informed the publication, in 1817, of another of her literary regenerations, the translation from the French of Xavier de Maistre's, *Le Lépreux de la cité d'Aoste* as *The Leper of the City of Aoste*. An implicit anti-imperialism pervades the seemingly slight story of a leper recounted to a Savoyard soldier garrisoned in the town of Aoste in the Aosta Valley, between Italy and Switzerland. Representative of a reconstitution of Napoleonic iconography in post-Waterloo France, the novel is also remarkable in its choice of subject and in its execution. The aesthetic merit of Williams's selection of a narrative concerning leprosy is indicative of her Romantic insistence on the depiction of light and dark. More fascinating still is the experimental style in which she (re)creates the story. Throughout the work, Williams allows her creativity the freedom of its most liberated

³⁸ Antoine François Bertrand de Moleville, *A Refutation of the Libel on the Memory of the Late King of France, Published by Helen Maria Williams, under the Title of Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1804).

expression, yet remains by turns, literally faithful, the style representing her most ambitious and joyfully playful realisation of assimilated influence.

In the period between the disastrous publication of *The Correspondence* and the triumph of *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, Williams had become a close friend of the scientist and traveller, Alexander von Humboldt; a relationship which was to endure until her death.

Williams translated into English two of Humboldt's most important works, the two-volume, *Researches Concerning the Institutions and Monuments of the Ancient Inhabitants of America, with Descriptions and Views of some of the Most Striking Scenes in the Cordilleras* (1814) and the longer, seven-volume, *Personal Narrative of Travels in Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent during the Years 1799-1804* (1814-29), both of which were to become highly-successful.³⁹

Williams's final published work, the *Souvenirs de la révolution française*, appeared in French in the year of her death, 1827.⁴⁰ The work was published only in its French translation, translated from the English by her nephew, Charles Coquerel from material she had been collating since 1823, the year of her final publication of poetry in *Poems on Various Subjects*. Whilst not strictly a translation, *per se*, performed by Williams, the work is, of course, literally a translation. Not only that, but the nexus of translational interconnections contained in this final work allows for its bookending of Williams's life and work in two important ways. Firstly, whilst it is an autobiography, the reminiscences within are nevertheless reinterpreted and rewritten in a French voice. Whilst this voice is that of her nephew Williams, no doubt, had no small input in the collation and editing of the final production. In fact, in the chapter concerned, I will suggest that the voice is Williams's. The work, therefore, becomes the final reinterpretation of Williams by herself from British to French, the ultimate

³⁹ These works will henceforth be referred to in the text as the *Researches* and the *Personal Narrative*, respectfully.

⁴⁰ The work will henceforth be referred to in the text as the *Souvenirs*.

self-translation from England, its language, culture and politics, into the political and literary French identity with which she had legally been attributed in 1817. Second, the book is the last word on Williams's interpretation of the revolution and her final definition of the period left by her for perpetuity.

Celebrated by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke as 'the most staunch and outspoken British supporter of the Revolution in the Romantic period', Williams remains relatively occluded and her definition as a key figure in European Romantic translation has yet to be established.⁴¹ Regarding Williams scholarship in broader terms, Deborah Kennedy's superlative biography, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, represents the only monograph on the subject since Lionel Woodward's *Une Anglaise amie de la Révolution française* (1930), a work published only in French and itself an interesting example of Anglo-French literary exchange. Steven Blakemore's *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the French Revolution* (1997), relied largely upon Woodward for biographical detail. Highlighting the deficiency in Williams scholarship and the necessity for increased attention to her position, Blakemore states that, 'while Woodward's dated biography is useful – the only full biography published in the last two hundred years – a new thorough one is needed.'⁴² In 2001 Craciun and Lokke edited a collection entitled *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* containing a chapter by Deborah Kennedy: 'Benevolent Historian: Helen Maria Williams and her British Readers.' In the same year Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser published their edition of the *Letters Written in France 1790*, a work rightly celebrated as of fundamental importance to Romantic studies and to Williams scholarship and an invaluable source in the research for this project. The long-awaited, new biography called for by Blakemore appeared

⁴¹ Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke, eds, *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (NY: State University of New York, 2001), p. 11.

⁴² Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the French Revolution* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1997), p. 160.

in 2002 with the publication of Kennedy's comprehensive monograph, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*.

Much of the work on Williams's rediscovery had hitherto taken the shorter form of chapters and articles. Angela Keane published the article 'Helen Maria Williams' *Letter from France: A National Romance*' (1992) in the journal *Prose Studies*, and she devoted a chapter to Williams in *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (2000). Mary A. Favret's book, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, politics and the fiction of letters* (1994), contains a chapter on Williams entitled 'Helen Maria Williams and the Letters of History' in which she examined Williams as revolutionary historian in epistolary form. Craciun published her own book-length study of the period, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (2005), in which she addressed the implications of both pro-revolutionary and anti-revolutionary feminine writings and the complexities of politics and gender during the period. Two further works worthy of mention here are Stephanie M. Hilger's 2009 book, *Women Write Back: Strategies of Response and the Dynamics of European Literary Culture, 1790-1805* and Sandra Adickes 1991 work, *The Social Quest: The Expanded Vision of Four Women Travellers in the Era of the French Revolution*.⁴³ A survey of Williams scholarship quickly reveals the historical scarcity of

⁴³ Other articles and chapters which have appeared include Sophie von La Roche, in, 'Swiss Travel Narratives during the French Revolution', in, *Not So Innocent Abroad: The Politics of Travel Writing*, ed by Ulrike Brisson and Bernard Schweizer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009); Lia Guerra, 'Helen Maria Williams: The Shaping of a Poetic Identity', in, *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender*, ed by Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Peitropoli (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Nigel Leask, 'Salons, Alps and Cordilleras: Helen Maria Williams, Alexander Von Humboldt, and the Discourse of Romantic Travel', in, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001); Richard C. Sha, 'Expanding the Limits of Feminine Writing: The Prose Sketches of Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) and Helen Maria Williams' in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed by Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995); Gary Kelly, 'Helen Maria Williams' in *British Reform Writers, 1789-1832*, ed by Gary Kelly and Ed Applegate (Detroit: Thomas Gale, 1995); Mary Favret, 'Spectatrice as Spectacle: Helen Maria Williams at Home in the Revolution' in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed by Catherine R. Montfort and Jenene Allison (Birmingham AL, Summa, 1994); Deborah Kennedy, "'Storms of Sorrow": The Poetry of Helen Maria Williams' in *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, ed by Josiane Boulad-Ayoub, Michael Cartwright, Michel Grenon, and William Kinsley (Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1991); M. Ray Adams 'Helen Maria Williams and the French Revolution' in *Wordsworth and Coleridge* (London: 1939); Félix Paknadel, 'Trois Anglaises en France pendant la Révolution' in *L'Etranger dans la littérature et la pensée anglaises*, ed by N. J. Rigaud (Aix-en-

works concerned with Williams as a translator. Louise Joy's recent article on *Julia* is an example of the growing interest in the field. However, research in the main has tended to focus on *Paul and Virginia* as the location from which to discuss Williams as a translator and as being representative of her work in translation as a whole. The discourse concerning *Paul and Virginia* has been enriched by contributions from Anna Barker, Laura Kirkley, David Sigler and Barbara Pauk, but the net must be cast wider.⁴⁴ The movement towards further excavation of women's writing and of women's translation, in particular, grows apace, as several collections edited by Gillian Dow, attest but there remains the question of the contextual configuration of Williams's translation corpus over the period. Viewed as a whole, there is much more to be said about her contribution, not only to translation theory and practice following 1789, but about the development of her self-translation and her literary-political life.

Angela Keane has recently reviewed the relative scarcity of Williams scholarship as a whole relative to that concerned with more fêted names, also highlighting the zeitgeist of rediscovery currently at hand, claiming that technology and academic momentum mean that

Provence, Univ. De Provence, 1989); Richard Grivil, 'Helen Maria Williams: Wordsworth's Revolutionary Anima', *Wordsworth Circle*, 40.1 (2009), 55-64; Carline Franklin, "'The Colour of a Riband': Patriotism, History, and the Role of Women in Helen Maria Williams's Sketches of Manners and Opinions in the French Republic (1801)', *Women's Writing*, 13.3 (2006), 495-508; Jack Fruchtman, 'The Aesthetics of Terror: Burke's Sublime and Helen Maria Williams's Vision of Anti-Eden', in, *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, 6 (2001), Jack Fruchtman, 'The Politics of Sensibility: Helen Maria Williams's Julia and the Terror in France' in *Eighteenth-Century Women: Studies in Their Lives, Work, and Culture*, vol. 1 (London; New York: AMS Press, 2001), ; Stephen Blakemore, 'Revolution and the French Disease: Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's Letters to Helen Maria Williams', *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36.3 (1996), 673-691; Deborah Kennedy, 'Spectacle of the Guillotine: Helen Maria Williams and the Reign of Terror' in *Philological Quarterly*, 73.1 (1994), 95-113; Deborah Kennedy, 'Revolutionary Tales: Helen Maria Williams's Letters from France and William Wordsworth's "Vaudracour and Julia"', *Wordsworth Circle*, 21.3 (1990), 109-114; Nicola J. Watson, 'Novel Eloisas: Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Narratives in Helen Maria Williams, Wordsworth, and Byron', *Wordsworth Circle* 23.1 (1992), 18-23; Chris Jones, 'Helen Maria Williams and Radical Sensibility', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 12.1 (1989), 3-24.

⁴⁴ Anna Barker, 'Helen Maria Williams' *Paul and Virginia* and the Experience of Mediated Alterity' in *Translating Women*, ed by Louise von Flotow (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010); Laura Kirkley, 'Translating Rousseauism: Transformations of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* in the works of Helen Maria Williams and Maria Edgeworth' in *Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); David Sigler, "The Ocean of Futurity, Which Has No Boundaries": The Deconstructive Politics of Helen Maria Williams's Translation of *Paul and Virginia*, *European Romantic Review* 23:5 (2012), 575-592; Barbara Pauk, 'Promoting Feminism and an International Community of Letters: Helen Maria Williams' *Paul and Virginia*', in *Literature as Translation/Translation as Literature*, ed by Christopher Conti and James Gourley (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

Williams's work is 'easier to teach, talk about and take for granted.'⁴⁵ The problem is that it is the translations as a body of work which have been taken for granted, at the cost of understanding Williams more holistically, not only as a poet and prose historian of the 1789 revolution, but as the literal translator of that revolution and Romantic (re)interpreter of France. In translation, Williams experiments with political, metaphysical, and philosophical modes of writing. She prefigures French Romantics' embracing of the dialectical literary interplay of light and dark, in fact the chiaroscuro of the more literary works is one of their defining features.

Alison E. Martin and Susan Pickford have recently argued for a reappraisal of our understanding of translation and travel away from the ubiquitous, purely metaphorical terms which dominate the discourse, arguing instead for an acknowledgement that 'the circle of knowledge is a practice located in the routines of everyday life and in the interaction between agents [...] themselves part of specific networks.'⁴⁶ Williams provides us with the materials for both analyses for, as Michael Cronin and Susan Bassnett have often reminded us: 'The translator [...] is also a traveller, someone engaged in a journey from one source to another.'⁴⁷ We must, therefore, speak in metaphorical terms of Williams as a traveller between languages and cultures, but we can also speak of her more pragmatically as a physical traveller. Furthermore, we can take up Martin and Pickford's mantle, as it is by understanding Williams's everyday life in Paris as an agent of change that we can assess the translations themselves, particularly as much of the influence on her developing practice came to her through the specific networks of friends and acquaintances in the city.

Discussing Schleiermacher's insistence on foreignising (moving the reader towards the author), Anthony Pym argues that, 'the idea of moving people must be a mere metaphor for

⁴⁵ Keane, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Alison E. Martin and Susan Pickford, *Travel Narratives in Translation, 1750-1830: Nationalism, Ideology, Gender* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (London; NY: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.

translation, just one link in a long chain of metaphors strung across Schleiermacher's text and down through the long history of binarisms.'⁴⁸ So rich in figurative language, the text, according to Pym, 'is perhaps nothing more than a chain of metaphors without a stable object.'⁴⁹ Despite its status as a fundamental text in modern translation history, the work struggles with concretising terms (Schleiermacher has often been criticised for the lack of definition of his future translator's dictionary, for example). Subsequently, much translation writing does seem dependent on metaphors as its descriptive apparatus, but how is one then to speak? Without recourse to metaphor, discussion of anything, particularly translation, becomes highly problematic, if not impossible.

'Yet this' as Pym states, 'is an excessively unhappy conclusion.'⁵⁰ We must allow for the continuation of discussing Williams and translation in both metaphoric and concrete terms as, 'after all', states Pym, 'if people didn't move, there would be no translation.'⁵¹ 'Perhaps', Pym continues, 'translation, as a metaphor, does no more than express the movement of people. When Schleiermacher talks about moving authors and readers, it is ultimately because some authors and readers really do move.'⁵² Williams really did move. In fact, she is the personification of the word, traveller. A courageous adventurer, she ventured from the safety of England to the crucible of post-revolutionary Paris, resisting consistent attempts at her removal and suffering continuous attacks in the British press as well as harassment from successive Parisian authorities and provoking the personal ire of Napoleon. Remaining in France, she became a satellite in Revolutionary orbit, all the time receiving and (re)transmitting competing and complementary aspects of European Romantic thought. As a cultural-linguistic intermediary, she maintained the liminal spaces, travelling between

⁴⁸Anthony Pym, 'Schleiermacher and the Problem of *Blendlinge*', *Translation and Literature*, 4:1 (1995), 5-30 (p. 4).

⁴⁹Pym, p. 4.

⁵⁰Pym, p. 4.

⁵¹Pym, p. 4.

⁵²Pym, pp. 4-5.

languages, through psychologies, literatures and philosophies. Williams was always interpreting, mediating, (re)creating, and retelling.

In order to understand Williams in context, temporal boundaries must be defined. We have discussed the French Revolution of 1789 as representing the starting point for Williams's French afterlife, marking the beginnings of her residence in France and of her translation career. Her death in 1827 gives us an obvious point at which to close this research, not least because it is the year in which her *Souvenirs* was published. We may also discuss the suggested time-frame by reference to contemporary developments in translation theory and cultural conventions. Critics, such as Susan Bassnett, have criticised George Steiner's diachronic division in *After Babel* (1975) of four periods of the theory and history of translation for ignoring the implications of cultural dynamism.⁵³ Bassnett and others have argued that relationships of history and culture must be comprehended as being more dynamic than simplistic markers in chronological models allow. This multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-directional approach has its merits; however the purpose of this thesis and the contextualisation of Williams as a Romantic translator necessitates a temporal delimitation.

In fact, Steiner states that his 'lines of division are by no means absolute.'⁵⁴ Indeed, his third and fourth stages of translation history are nebulous in their respective end and beginning points. However, Steiner's structural paradigm is useful in the construction of the contextual framework of this study, as the juncture of the first two epochs coincide with the period of Williams's French residency and in some respects mirrors the evolution of her translation following the catalyst of the Revolution. According to Steiner, the first era, in which 'seminal analyses and pronouncements stem directly from the enterprise of the translator', spans from

⁵³ For Steiner's definition of the four translational epochs, see George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Steiner, p. 248.

the writings of Cicero and Homer from around 46 – 26 B.C. to the publication of Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, first published anonymously in 1791, and Friedrich Schleiermacher's essay *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (*On the Different Methods of Translating*) in 1813, the same year as publication of the third edition of Tytler's essay.⁵⁵ All of Williams's pronouncements on translation, found in the paratextual material of prefaces in the main, stem directly from the particular work at hand. Coterminous with Tytler and working through a mode indicative of affinity with contemporary German theorists, Williams could be positioned firmly within this stage.

However, notwithstanding her biographical timeline, the meeting point with the second stage, an epoch of 'theory and hermeneutic enquiry', represents a further example of the literary-philosophical thresholds over which hovers Williams's liminal ghost.⁵⁶ Whilst she may have begun her career within the first range, she develops an idiosyncratic style, largely influenced by progressive European thought coming to her from Schlegel *et al* through Madame de Staël, throughout the second. Until her death, her work shows the evolution of a personal theory of translation as escape, but more importantly of translation as the means of transfer of ideas and of political thought. Though it may appear simplistic to say that translation allows for the transfer of ideas, for Williams it was the transfer of the originating revolutionary idea which was the motivating force with which her work is charged.

As we have seen, Williams's life can be characterised by her liminality, by her occupation of the precarious middle-ground between nations, languages, political ideologies and cultures. We have also seen how she can be positioned over the thresholds of literary, translational and theoretic epochs. At all times the mediator, Williams resides in a unique position. From birth, as a child of Sottish-Irish parentage, living in the border town of Berwick-upon-Tweed,

⁵⁵ Steiner, p. 248.

⁵⁶ Steiner, p. 249.

Williams's identity was multi-faceted. As a dynamic *mélange*, a dense network of interwoven streams of influence, Williams represents an archetypal hybrid, or *Blendlingin* (Gr.). The German plural, *Blendlinge*, is found in Schleiermacher's 1813 lecture. Not easily translated and often not appearing in German translation dictionaries, the term is often rendered as 'bastards' and was adopted by Anthony Pym in a redefinition towards the translator as mediator. According to Andrew Chesterman, Pym defines translators as 'typical "Blendlinge", half-castes, social actors inhabiting an intercultural space.'⁵⁷ Whilst I dislike the negative nuances of the attributions 'bastard' and 'half-caste', particularly as applied to Williams, we must harness the idea of hybridity as fundamental to our appreciation of her life and work. Pym suggests a reinterpretation of the Schleiermacheran *Blendlinge* in order to contest historical binary definitions within translation theory and translation studies, arguing that, 'the basic binarism remains [...], not just in the mode of thought but more importantly in the generalized refusal to consider the translator, or the place of the translator, as a viable third term.'⁵⁸ Historical dualism persists to the exclusion of a third conception based on the relationships of multi-directional influence, mediation and negotiation. Williams offers a paradigm for the reconfiguration of translator as mediator, in her movement of self and in her translation omni-directionally and from a liminal subject-position. For Pym, translational movement based on Schleiermacheran binarism must be:

Either inward or outward. The two cannot be mixed. The translator must work one way or the other. You can't walk backwards and forwards at the same time. In geopolitical terms, this means one cannot stay on the frontier between France and Germany. There is no neutrality, no intermediary position, no sitting on the fence.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), p. 170.

⁵⁸ Pym, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Pym, p. 14.

This is a problem for any indeterminate or mediating force and does nothing to describe the agency of those, like Williams, at home in the liminal spaces. Operating as an intermediary between Anglo-French literature and pan-European thought, she did offer a third way. In linguistic terms, the movement in the translations, particularly in the *Leper of the City of Aoste*, is marked by a continuous motion inward and outward, forwards and backwards.

Williams often occupies two spaces at the same time with the translation oscillating between creative and faithful. In life and work, Williams embraced the unknown and, to quote Pym, ‘risk[ed] living in the maligned middle ground’, always moving and communicating multi-dimensionally towards a universalist ideal.⁶⁰

As Pym states, ‘it would be foolhardy to suggest that all translators are Blendlinge [...]. Yet the complex semantics of the German term can be used as a field for producing hypotheses about translators.’⁶¹ Williams is the archetypal *Blendlingin*. As mediator of, at times, complimentary and conflicting streams of French and German thought on politics, literature and translation, Williams represents a coalescence of ideas which form an understanding of her as quintessentially Romantic. Mediating intellectual currents in Germany, Williams’s work shows the influence of Schlegel in particular, who, according to Kittel and Poltermann, ‘tried to combine the “objective” and the “subjective” aspects of translation: fidelity to the source text, on the one hand, and creative transformation and naturalisation in accordance with target-side requirements, on the other.’⁶² Eternally liminal, Williams operated within the realms of the paradoxical relationships between writing subjectively towards an objectively realised history of the Revolution.

Following Schlegel, Schleiermacher, according to Kittel and Poltermann, ‘contrasted, with unprecedented sharpness of focus, the translatorial methods of “alienation” and

⁶⁰ Pym, p. 15.

⁶¹ Pym, p. 16.

⁶² Harald Kittel and Andreas Poltermann, ‘German Tradition’, in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed by Mona Baker (London; NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 423.

“naturalisation”.’⁶³ In 1817, Williams, alienated from Britain, was naturalised in France. In this sense, she becomes a true embodiment of what Kittel and Poltermann term, ‘the Romantic concept of translation.’⁶⁴ The omni-directional physical and artistic movement of Williams and of her translations, from the self-imposition of *Paul and Virginia*, through the pseudo-translation of *The Correspondence*, to the chiaroscuro of *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, the scientific explorations of the Humboldt translations to the final self-translation of the *Souvenirs*, combine as testament to a definition of Williams as the most Romantic of translators. Williams’s strain of Romanticism emerges from her experiments at her base at the nexus of subjectivity-objectivity. She allows herself the full capacity of negative capability, described perfectly by Mary Klages as ‘the ability to stay in, be comfortable with, uncertainties, indeterminacies, mysteries, and doubts without needing to find some resolution or certainty.’⁶⁵ Following the post-revolutionary corruption of ideals in Robespierre’s and in Napoleon’s Paris, certainty was an elusive quarry. Williams found a home in uncertainty and, learning to translate from within, became the pre-eminent mediator of doubts and indeterminacies. Her mastery of the mysterious becomes the defining trait of her Romantic translation.

Instead of concrete truths, Williams persistently offers a mediation towards an understanding to be reached in futurity. She provides equivalences. In her afterlife she was herself, perhaps, the French equivalent of her English self. The work of translation scholar, Eugene Nida, provides useful nomenclature with which we can define Williams in translation together with Pym’s interpretation of Schleiermacher’s *Blendlinge*. A terminological derivation from Nida’s conception of equivalence is applicable to a construction of Williams as a unity of concepts. Admitting the non-existence of identical equivalents, Nida asserts that ‘there are

⁶³ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 423.

⁶⁴ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 423.

⁶⁵ Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum Books, 2006), p. 27.

fundamentally two different types of equivalence: one which may be called formal and another which is primarily dynamic.’⁶⁶ In extracting the term, *dynamic equivalence*, we can reform the notion and apply its connotations to Williams as the *dynamic equivalent*.

Naturalness is key to Nida’s idea of successful translation. However, Nida’s idea of naturalness is achieved by minimalizing the re-inscription of linguistic materials from source text, that is to say that foreignness is obviated. The approach is perhaps little more than an explanation consistent with historical emphasis on paraphrase. Dynamic equivalence is not, therefore, a theoretic concept from which I suggest a methodology from which to analyse Williams’s translations *per se*, although there was in her work certainly a dynamism at work on a linguistic level. Rather, it is the idea of Williams again as an incarnation of the “‘closest natural equivalent to the source-language message’” which is useful.⁶⁷ As a dynamic equivalent herself, she represents the closest version of the ‘message’ of France and of the French Revolution.

Naturalness was key to this process. According to Fraistat and Lanser, ‘Williams hailed French liberty as the epitome of the “natural”’.⁶⁸ The transformation of the Bastille in ‘Letter III’ of the *Letters Written in France 1790* shows Williams’s evocation of revolutionary naturalness under the spell of her most pastoral muse. The site becomes the totemic representation of the transformative power of progressive politics even on the earth itself. ‘The ruins of that execrable fortress,’ she writes, ‘were suddenly transformed, as if with the wand of necromancy, into a scene of beauty and pleasure.’⁶⁹ The immediacy of the change gives a mystical aspect to her description, something akin to religious writing, a timbre most fitting to the devotional nature in which she expresses her revolutionary faith. The horrors of

⁶⁶ Eugene Nida, ‘Principles of Correspondence’, from *Toward A Science of Translating, With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*, in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (NY; London: Routledge, 2004), p. 156.

⁶⁷ Nida, in Venuti, ed., p. 61.

⁶⁸ Fraistat and Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Williams, ‘Letter III’, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 72.

pre-revolutionary times are instantly transformed into an Eden-like garden of bounty which Williams describes thus:

The ground was covered with clods of grass, upon which young trees were placed in rows, and illuminated with a blaze of light. Here the minds of the people took a higher tone of exultation than in the other scenes of festivity. Their mutual congratulations, their reflections on the horror of the past, their sense of present felicity, their cries of 'Vive la Nation,' still ring in my ear! I too, though but a sojourner in their land, rejoiced in their happiness, joined the universal voice, and repeated with all my heart and soul, 'Vive la Nation!'⁷⁰

But a visitor, Williams imposes herself nonetheless. The self-inscription reinforces the naturalness of the scene as she notes things as simply a traveller reporting on a viewed event. There would be no place for hyperbole in the reportage of a dispassionate proto-journalist. Williams can thereby modestly attest to having seen the bucolic ideal which sprang up at the capital's political rebirth. The religiosity of the blaze of light finally fixes the scene and the revolution itself as having divine provenance, a gift from God perhaps at which the people, one people, express a higher exultation. Note also the ingenious way in which Williams talks of the universal voice. The revolution represents the natural expression of a communal humanity. The universality of the text itself points to the naturalness she perceives and illustrates the omni-directionality consistent with her mediation. Whilst the paragraph is in English, there is an insistence on retaining the French 'Vive la Nation!' Williams provides the translation, 'Long live the nation' in her note. She might easily have made the translation within the text. By choosing the French version, she not only retains the sonorous force of the phrase, but she allows for the reminder of the foreignness of the culture for Anglophone readers. Not only this, but most importantly in keeping the 'natural' language as it was spoken (and heard by our reporter), she further emphasises the harmony and naturalness of the scene. Indeed, she adopts the phrase herself at the end of the paragraph when she joins in

⁷⁰ Williams, 'Letter III', *Letters Written in France 1790*, pp. 72-3.

celebration and it is as if the language emerges from a place outside of national and linguistic boundaries, as though it stems from a holy place and pervades the very nature of humanity itself. The idea is further cemented in the following letter, 'Letter IV' in which she employs the same rhetorical strategy. Reporting in more depth on her visit to the Bastille, she retains the French, 'A la Bastille—mais nous n'y resterons pas.'⁷¹ Again, she makes the translation ('To the Bastille, – but we will not remain there.') in the note.⁷² But why, when she could simply have made the translation? Again, whilst reinscribing the foreignness of the French language Williams simultaneously suggests the universality of the ideas and the naturalness of French liberty.

In the same letter she employs a delightfully playful trick further on in quoting a section of *Measure for Measure*. By placing Shakespeare, emerging in the period as the quintessentially English literary voice (Shakespeare became the model for the development of German nationalist translation and was also championed by Coleridge and Hazlitt), against French phraseology, Williams hybridises cultural materials, suggesting a communality of reception and a transcendent level of understanding. The phrase, which is perhaps also used as a feminist critique of patriarchal authority, is once again shot through with religious nuance and is used well to reinforce the idea of divine provenance:

'Man! Proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep.'⁷³

The angels were made to weep, of course, at the fantastic tricks of those 'men' in power in the *Ancien Régime*. The glorious new order inspired by holy intervention and established at the revolution is the means by which the world can be set aright. Williams adopts this as her

⁷¹ Williams, 'Letter IV', *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 73.

⁷² Williams, 'Letter IV', *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 73, n. 2.

⁷³ Williams, 'Letter IV', *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 73.

creed. According to Jeremy Munday, Nida's work has been dismissed for its 'theological and proselytizing standpoint' and critics have damned dynamic equivalence for 'serv[ing] the purpose of converting the receptors, no matter what their culture, to the dominant ideas of Protestant Christianity.'⁷⁴ Stripping away the neo-colonialist associations, we can propose a similar notion of *dynamic equivalence* with Williams. The originating ideals which motivated the actors in 1789 took on a religious significance for Williams and she spent the rest of her life proselytizing a revolutionary universalism through her translations. Ever intent on converting her receptors to the dominant ideas of the Revolution, this became her life's work. As revolutionist missionary, Williams takes up the sword of truth against her critics of her fervour early on, stating firmly:

In answer to these accusations, I shall only observe, that it is very difficult, with common sensibility, to avoid sympathizing in general happiness. My love of the French Revolution, is the natural result of this sympathy, and therefore my political creed is entirely an affair of the heart; for I have not been so absurd as to consult my head upon matters of which it is so incapable of judging.⁷⁵

There can be nothing more natural than following one's heart. In this sense we can suggest that Williams was a very dynamic equivalent (we can also discern Williams's mastery of irony, here, in her self denial as a woman only capable of appropriately gendered concerns). But Williams wanted to offer more than equivalence with her revolutionary mission. Susanne Schmid argues that:

⁷⁴ Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008) p. 43. See also, Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories* 2nd Ed.(Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001).

⁷⁵ Williams, 'Letter IX', *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 91.

Since Romantic writers are fundamentally concerned with the very nature of language, Romantic theories of translation, which constitute the foundation of modern translation theory, presume that translations must provide more than equivalents.⁷⁶

In her translations and in her political life, Williams wanted to contribute to a mutuality of understanding based on mediation, rather than on binaries or sufficiency. The third way, in political terms, was a fundamental *bouleversement* of that which had gone before, the Revolution. In terms of translation, her style often oscillated between creative and faithful, she more often occupies a middle ground from which she attempts to mediate revolutionary language and culture towards multi-cultural universalism.

Williams's work in translation always shows the evidence of her (second) lifelong project of mediation through the internalising of French and German thought and retransmission into Britain from France and across the reverse axis, back across the channel. Fraistat and Lanser point out, for example, that from as early as 1790, the *Letters Written in France 1790* 'inscribes not only the excitement of a single observer, but the dreams of Enlightened thinkers across Europe that this French Revolution could bring justice, liberty, and equality to all humanity.'⁷⁷ Whilst the *Letters* are not strictly translations, there is a sense that Williams was always attempting to translate ideas and, in particular, somehow transfer the emotional and intellectual connection she felt at her exposure to attitudes and events in Revolutionary Paris.

The thesis which follows analyses the development of Williams's Parisian career in translation in chronological order of publication throughout the period of her *afterlife* from 1791 to 1827. Consistent with the spirit of mediation and intellectual dynamism, chapters which address specific works are interspersed with chapters focusing on translation theory and on broader aspects of Williams's portrait, such as the wealth of Williams's paratextual

⁷⁶ Schmid, p. 67.

⁷⁷ Fraistat and Lanser, eds, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 15.

material. In order to establish a definitive base from which to speak about Williams as a translator, the following chapter examines *Paul and Virginia* and the nature of Williams's style and practice in the first example from her translation corpus from France. There follows a chapter on the development of European translation theory towards a contemporary contextualisation of Williams as a Romantic translator. Thereafter, a chapter on *The Correspondence* explores a key work in her literary output, outside of the reportage, in the writing of the revolution in translation with special attention given to the notion of pseudotranslation. The work here consists in the main of analysis of the paratextual material of the notes on each letter which leads to a discussion, in the subsequent chapter of the paratextual work of her prefaces overall; the group of prefaces being the location from which we can discuss her attitudes to translation itself and her theoretic position. A chapter on *The Leper of the City of Aoste* follows, describing the development of Williams's style in the novel which is, in some respects, a companion piece to *Paul and Virginia* and a work which reveals the prismatic nature of Williams's reception of European influences. Appropriately, the ultimate chapter concerning an individual work focuses on the final publication in the year of her death: the *Souvenirs*. The chapter concentrates on the theoretic concept of self-translation, in both literary and psychological senses, as a means of discussing the end of Williams's journey, both in her life and work.

With regard to the Humboldt translations, these represent such a voluminous body of work as to warrant a book-length study devoted solely to their textual analysis. The work necessitates a separate, discrete thesis and one which it is hoped will be undertaken following the reception of the work, here. The Humboldt translations are, therefore, discussed here in a condensed form in the concluding chapter of the thesis in which they are assessed relation the paradoxical nature of translation and, in particular, to Williams as the mediator of mystery, uncertainty and undecidability. In conclusion, the thesis suggests Williams as the pre-eminent

Romantic translator of the period, the mediator of contemporary European thought and the physical embodiment of the translated self. ‘Williams’s career,’ writes Orianne Smith, ‘was shaped by her confidence in the utopian potential of the written word as an agent for social change.’⁷⁸ Indeed. I would like to argue for interpolation (*à la Williams*) of the idea that Williams in translation was, herself, the very agent of change, the skilful and experimental mediator of alterity and the constant traveller between and through language, literature and culture in the crucible of some of the most significant events in European history. Douglas Robinson translates Cicero’s famous: *non converti ut interpretes sed ut orator*, as, “‘I did not convert them as a translator, but as an orator’”⁷⁹ Following her self-definition in the first volume of the *Letters Written in France 1790*, we might propose the following the following statement as applying to Williams’s manifesto to all those works of reinterpretation created in France: ‘I did not convert them as a translator, but as a citizen of the world.’⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 99.

⁷⁹ Cicero, *The Best Kind of Orator (De optimo genere oratorum, 46 B.C.E)*, H. M. Hubbell trans., in Douglas Robinson, ed., *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2002), p. 9.

⁸⁰ Williams writes of, on seeing the celebrations in the Champ de Mars at the Fête de la federation, of becoming, ‘in that moment a citizen of the world.’ ‘Letter II’, *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 69.

Chapter 2

Paul and Virginia

In the collection of prose fragments, *Mon coeur mis à nu* (*My Heart Laid Bare*), Baudelaire declares, ‘Parce que je comprends une existence glorieuse, je me crois capable de la réaliser’.⁸¹ Translated by Norman Cameron as ‘because I can conceive of a glorious existence, I believe I can achieve it’, the statement, itself illustrative of trans-lingual complexity, is immediately followed by the ambiguous, vocative, ‘Ô Jean-Jacques!’, ‘Ah, Jean-Jacques!’⁸² Meaning is elusive, obscured further by translation and deferred understanding. The French and English sounds of Ô, *Oh* and *Ah* contain hermeneutic nuances, both inter- and intra-linguistically, which offer potentially divergent interpretations.⁸³ Do we hear Baudelaire sigh at Rousseau’s faults or do we rather detect an acknowledgement of Jean-Jacques’s powers of idealistic visualisation, whilst despairing at the failings of his disciples?

As Lawrence Venuti has argued, translation ‘is a reminder that no act of interpretation can be definitive’ and, whilst the ambiguity is perplexing, as with so many other examples of nineteenth-century literary paradox it does not necessarily require, nor allow, finality in definition.⁸⁴ Of course Baudelaire’s anti-revolutionist politics are well documented it and would seem, therefore, appropriate to infer antipathy from Baudelaire’s invocation of

⁸¹ Charles Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu*, in, Claude Pichois, ed., *Baudelaire: Oeuvres Complètes* (*Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*) 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-77), I. 672.

⁸² Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I.672; Norman Cameron, trans., *Charles Baudelaire : My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings*, ed Peter Quennell (London: Soho Books, 1986), p. 209.

⁸³ Though brief, the first part of Norman Cameron’s 1950 translation of Baudelaire’s, illustrates the multiplicity of translational and hermeneutic possibility inherent in the transaction. The potential of the first person present tense instance of the verb *comprendre*, for example, is complex. Cameron selects “I can conceive” implying, perhaps, “I can imagine”, though “I understand”, “I see”, “I know”, are all slightly differing possibilities. I draw attention to this in order to demonstrate both the translator’s agency and also to challenge a view of translation as mechanical, inter-lingual transcription. In the second part of the phrase, Cameron’s version is thus: “Ah, Jean-Jacques!” The interjection, “Oh”, is also possible here, a slightly different sound, containing further nuance.

⁸⁴ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 46.

Rousseau. However, within the ambiguities of a translation concerning comprehension and the power of visionary experience, whatever Baudelaire's true feelings, Rousseau maintains a shadowy presence. In translation, Jean-Jacques is an uncertain spectre.

Rousseau was also a consistent, if finally perhaps undecidable, presence for Helen Maria Williams, who possessed a Baudelairean certainty in the power of visionary experience, having first glimpsed the glorious potential for political and social change at the *Fête de la Fédération*. Despite her experiences during the *Terror* and the disillusionment at revolutionary corruption she always held it as a truth that the revolutionary ideology enacted there could be realized. Because she had perceived the possibility for a glorious existence for humankind, she believed it was possible and Williams always deemed herself capable of helping to realise it through her writings, none more so than her translations. An engagement with what Laura Kirkley terms 'Rousseau's sentimental philosophy' was instrumental in the formation of Williams's political consciousness and literary output and in her 'self-construction as a "Solitary Walker."'”⁸⁵ As dispossessed *flâneuse*, wandering through geo-political and literary space, Williams recast her encounters with a traveller's eye. After the re-inscription of *La nouvelle Héloïse* as *Julia* (1790), Rousseau's trace can be seen refracted through Williams's lens in the translation of his friend and pupil, Bernardin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* as *Paul and Virginia*.

David Sigler suggests that 'the transoceanic movement of Virginia, in particular, demands to be understood in two incompatible ways. The double-coding of her movement,' Sigler argues, 'produces in herself and others, the complicated feeling of living in one's "own country...as in a foreign land."'”⁸⁶ Perennial *étrangère*, interpolating herself into and between

⁸⁵ Laura Kirkley, 'Translating Rousseauism: Transformations of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* in the works of Helen Maria Williams and Maria Edgeworth', in, Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow, eds, *Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 107.

⁸⁶ David Sigler, "'The Ocean of Futurity, Which Has No Boundaries": The Deconstructive Politics of Helen Maria Williams's Translation of *Paul and Virginia*.' in *European Romantic Review*, 23:5, 575-592, p. 584.

nations, identities, philosophies and cultures, Williams demands, to extend Sigler's argument, to be understood in two, and perhaps more incompatible ways as does her work in translation. A paradoxical text, *Paul and Virginia* is often ambivalent, the translation is built upon unsure foundations and refuses straightforward classifications. We may balk, for example, at the original novel's portrayal of slavery, a theme not altogether abandoned in Williams's version, an uncomfortable subject in its sympathetic portrayal of ownership and an intriguing choice for the poet of the *Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade* (1788).⁸⁷ In the preface to his edition of Bernardin's original, Jean Ehrard suggests the possibility that, '[p]eut-être sa séduction durable vient-elle de sa résistance à toute interprétation réductrice, de cette unité hétéroclite, culturellement et poétiquement si chargé de sens.' 'Perhaps its lasting appeal comes from its resistance to any reductive interpretation, of the unity of the heterogeneous whole, culturally and poetically so charged with meaning.' (Fr.)⁸⁸ We might well argue the same for Williams, and for her translations, works which are also resistant to such mono-dimensional interpretations. This chapter explores the translational dynamism of Williams's style, investigating the inherent paradoxes of the work and of the process, showing the developmental motion towards Williams's mediation of European literature and philosophy. *Paul and Virginia* reveals strands of intertextuality connecting it to the 1817 translation, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, through links with Napoleonic literary reception and the correspondences with Wordsworth's work in England.

Described by one critic, as “‘Un des livres les plus médiocres et les plus lus de la littérature française’” (“one of the most mediocre and most read books in French literature”), *Paul et Virginie* has been consistently republished, translated and reissued in France and abroad.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ The difficulty of reconciling the complicity of professed abolitionists is addressed at length in relation to Thomas Jefferson's slave ownership by Christopher Hitchens in *Jefferson: Author of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005) and by Simon Schama in *The American Future* (London: Vintage, 2009).

⁸⁸ Jean Ehrard, ed., *Paul et Virginie par Bernardin de Saint-Pierre* (Paris ; Gallimard, 2004), p. 26.

⁸⁹ Jean Ehrard, p. 7.

On its publication in England in 1795, Williams's translation was well-received and, according to Luisa Calé was, 'immediately embraced by the literary avant-garde, influencing William Wordsworth especially.'⁹⁰ Jonathan Wordsworth's introduction to the 1989 facsimile of the 1796 edition tells us that the work went through sixty editions by 1900. According to Calé, fifty-six of these had already appeared by 1799. Twenty of these editions were translations, the most successful being the Williams edition which also became the source text for many theatre productions, the first of which was James Cobb's *Paul and Virginia A Musical Drama*, first staged at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden on 1 May 1800.⁹¹ A challenge to claims as to its mediocrity, the republications are testament to the work's lasting appeal.

First published separately in 1789 (having first been published as part four of Bernardin's *Études de la nature* (1787-8)), the novel, whose first English translation as *Paul and Mary* by D. Malthus also appeared in 1789, had its effect on Napoleon, who used the book's pastoral formula as a template for his romantic novella, *Clisson et Eugénie* (1795, first trans. 2009). According to Peter Hicks and Émilie Barthet, following the republication in 1789, 'Napoleon was one of its most fervent readers.'⁹² *Paul et Virginie* remained a favourite. Napoleon's biographer, Las Cases recorded his continued admiration in the *Mémorial de St. Hélène*:

Un autre jour, c'était *Paul et Virginie* que lisait l'Empereur ; il en faisait ressortir les endroits touchants, ceux-là étaient toujours simples et naturels ; ceux où abondaient le pathos, les idées abstraites et fausses, tant à la mode lorsque l'ouvrage fut publié, étaient tous froids, mauvais, manqués. L'Empereur disait avoir été fort engoué de cet ouvrage dans sa jeunesse.

Another day, the Emperor was reading *Paul and Virginia*; he pointed out the touching passages, these were always simple and natural; those full of pathos, the abstract and false ideas, so much in fashion when the work was published, were deemed cold, bad

⁹⁰ Sigler, p. 575

⁹¹ Luisa Calé, 'Sympathy in Translation: *Paul and Virginia* on the London Stage', in *Romanticism on the Net*, 45 (May 2007).

⁹² Peter Hicks and Émilie Barthet, 'Interpretation', in Peter Hicks, trans., *Clisson and Eugénie: A Love Story by Napoleon Bonaparte* (London: Gallic Books, 2009), p. 64

and lacking. The Emperor said that he had been greatly infatuated with this work in his youth.⁹³

The timing of the novel's effect on *Clisson et Eugénie* (1795) is interesting. Williams translated the novel in the same year, although she could never have read Napoleon's spin on Bernardin's pastoral sentimentalism as it was not published until 2009, following collection and translation of several extant manuscripts. Kennedy records that during the time of her translation, begun just before she left for Switzerland in 1794 and completed 1795, Williams was subject to surveillance and had her house searched frequently, with many parts of the translation confiscated among other papers.⁹⁴ She was to suffer similar treatment later under Napoleon's orders regarding the publication of *The Correspondence* in 1803. Bernardin's novel left a profound impression on both Napoleon and Williams, personalities who would develop most divergent sensibilities in the ensuing decades. Their engagement with *Paul et Virginie* represents a further strand of intertextuality in the story of their mutual interconnections during the first part of the nineteenth century.

Ridiculed by Napoleon ('Mais si l'Empereur aimait *Paul et Virginie*, il riait de pitié [...] des *Études de la Nature*' 'but if [he] loved *Paul and Virginia*, he laughed with pity at the *Études* [...]'), Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was a friend of Williams.⁹⁵ An experienced traveller, renowned naturalist, and distinguished botanist, Bernardin travelled extensively throughout Europe in the early 1760s and spent three years on what was then l'Île de France, now Mauritius, from, 1768 to 1791, publishing an account of his time there in 1773 as *Voyage à l'Île de France*. The work was unsuccessful, critically and financially. Bernardin subsequently began work on the *Études de la Nature* which were later published in 1784 and

⁹³ Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné, comte de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène : Journal de la vie privée et des conversations de l'Empereur Napoléon, à Sainte-Hélène par le comte de Las Cases* 2 vols (Paris: E. Bourdin, 1842) I, p. 291. ; my trans.

⁹⁴ Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, pp. 122-3.

⁹⁵ Las Cases, p. 291

proved extremely successful. The observation of Nature was his *métier* and its interpretation towards an imaginative, educative function was an aspect that Wordsworth would later explore in much of the work produced at the end of the 1790s. The paradigm is most effectively employed in *The Prelude*, particularly in the 'Spots of time' sequences concerned with a natural communion towards self-examination.

As for Wordsworth so it had been for Bernardin, Nature was not simply a resource for the rendering of viewed phenomenon into popular literature, it was, to paraphrase *Tintern Abbey*, his guardian and guide. Nature held meaning. As he affirms in the *Études*, '[t]ous les ouvrages de la nature ont les besoins de l'homme pour fin', 'all the workings of Nature have the needs of man as their purpose.'⁹⁶ Nature was the means by which mankind could redeem itself and re-establish fractured links with God through goodness and the innate simplicity of the natural world. According to Peter France, as a disciple of Fénelon and Rousseau, Bernardin was 'filled with humanitarian zeal and a wish to reveal God through the wonders of nature. He looked not only back to a lost golden age of human happiness, which he had sought on his travels to distant lands, but also forward to a society purged of corruption, an ideal republic of justice and equality.'⁹⁷ We might wish to examine early on the integrity of this notion of equality in a novel in which the protagonists are colonial slave owners. It would seem, therefore, appropriate to address the question of slave ownership in *Paul et Virginie*, and in Williams's translation, before conducting any further analysis of the texts and their relationship.

Jones suggests that 'humanitarian and philanthropic crusades' were given impetus by sensibility, its production and reception, assisting in the progress of reform of large-scale

⁹⁶ Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Études de la Nature*, 3 vols (Paris : Didot, 1787), Vol. III, p. 145.

⁹⁷ France, ed., p. 86

operations such as the slave trade.⁹⁸ This presents a difficulty with the egalitarianism as promoted in Bernardin's novel of sensibility, *Paul et Virginie* as both families indeed possess slaves. Bernardin was, of course, writing towards an ideal republic, one which was just being forged in the crucible of the Revolution when the novel was first published. Whilst not wishing to excuse or sanction an acceptable face of literary slavery, it seems obvious to say that Bernardin was a writer of his time, a time in which the portrayal of slavery was not unusual to contemporary discourse. His strategy was to elicit sympathy through the benevolent attitudes of his owners in high contrast to the cruelty of the island's colonial plantation owners. In his chapter, 'Hands across the Ocean: Slavery and Sociability', David Simpson argues that 'hospitality and affection extended and betrayed are core components of the literature of slavery.'⁹⁹ Bernardin subverts generic expectations in presenting his slave-master relationship as one of mutuality, of (dubious) fellowship. His protagonists, through their natural education in the Rousseauvian community-republic, are able to recognise the humanity of their slaves (if not to free them) and treat them faithfully and respectfully. In turn, their slaves are emotionally responsive and form part of the familial social experiment. Not the most radically fervent of abolitionist writings, it is true. However, Bernardin nonetheless hoped to encourage empathic responses from his readers, thereby improving the potential for a major cultural shift. Furthermore, the novel takes place in the earlier part of the eighteenth century (Monsieur de la Tour having arrived on the island in 1726), the novel thus presenting a retrospective view of the possibility of change, a progression which would be realised with the formal abolition of slavery in France in 1794.

Williams had written directly on the theme in an earlier poem of 1788, her *Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade*, much of which, according to Kennedy, 'is

⁹⁸ Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

⁹⁹ David Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 186.

devoted to gaining sympathy for the slaves and appealing to the conscience of her readers', a similar strategy to that of Bernardin.¹⁰⁰ In maintaining the characterization of the slaves in her interpretation, Williams operates a faithful practice of translation. The fidelity certainly meets the three basic principles of Tytler's, *The Principle of Translation* (1791), that:

- 1) The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.
- 2) The style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- 3) The translation should have all the ease of the original composition.¹⁰¹

Ever the radical, however, Williams often felt the liberty to effect substantial changes. She acknowledges the excision of much of the original, for example, in her preface:

I have indeed taken one liberty with my author, which it is fit I should acknowledge; that of omitting several pages of general observations, which, however excellent in themselves, would be passed over by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative.¹⁰²

Analysis of the texts, and of Williams's praxis in other translations, reveals a great deal more than *one* liberty is taken. We might therefore reasonably ask why Williams, not usually afraid of creativity, nor diffident in her social commentary, should have left the characters of the slaves unedited from her translation. Arguably, Williams opts for fidelity in this aspect of the work in order to produce an effect she felt to be present in the original work. By omitting the characters entirely an opportunity, however slight, may have been lost. Similarly, an option of transforming the characters into domestic servants (historically, characters for whom it was difficult to promote sympathy) would have precluded the possibility of humanizing the slave character. Bernardin employs these characters to portray both the virtuous benevolence

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy, p. 45

¹⁰¹ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 67

¹⁰² Helen Maria Williams, *Bernardin de St-Pierre: Paul and Virginia 1796*, in Jonathan Wordsworth, p. iv

of the enlightened owners and in so doing, the inherent humanity of the slaves themselves.

Williams maintains the same device in order to achieve the same effect, promoting sympathy for the characters through the binary juxtaposition of natural virtue, fellowship, and benevolence against inhumane treatment at the hands of colonialist powers elsewhere on the island, and by extension *ancient regime* French society, and wider contemporary Europe.

An exploration of the Rousseauvian ideas concerning humanity in a ‘state of nature’ and morality through communion with the natural world in an organisation of a civil society based on a ‘general will’, *Paul et Virginie* tells the story of the lives of the eponymous protagonists, raised as brother and sister on the idealised paradise of l’île de France, the former French colony in the Indian Ocean. ‘The backdrop for the pastoral novel’, according to Peter Hicks and Émilie Barthet, ‘is nature untainted by civilisation.’¹⁰³ Napoleon employed the same device in *Clisson et Eugénie*, where the setting is ‘created around the aesthetic of “la belle nature,” which is meant to be a moral allegory of happy humanity living in simplicity.’¹⁰⁴ Displaced from their homeland following estrangement from a proscriptive and unforgiving society, the children’s mothers provide the narrative vehicle for Bernardin’s critique of *Ancien Régime* corruption. Madame de la Tour, the mother of Virginie, has been ostracised by her family for marrying below her station, whilst it is revealed later in the novel that Paul is the illegitimate son of a peasant with whom his mother, Marguerite had a brief affair. Having fled disgrace and having escaped the damning constraints of French society, the two mothers agree their intention to raise their children according to a more liberated and Rousseauvian model of existence. According to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, the two women, ‘determine that their children shall be reared in conformity with Nature’s laws, and accordingly accustom them to a simple, frugal, and hard-working

¹⁰³ Peter Hicks and Émilie Barthet, ‘Interpretation’, in Hicks, p. 64

¹⁰⁴ Hicks and Barthet, p. 64

existence free from social prejudice, religious superstition, or fear of authority.’¹⁰⁵ Maturing together in a harmonious natural environment Paul and Virginia are encouraged to develop their understanding of virtue through their interaction with the natural world, benevolence, piety, and a mutual appreciation of civic harmony.

The novel ends with the strands of sentimentality drawn together in a climax of the genre’s pleasure/pain duality. The reader’s pleasure derives from the melancholy of the narrative when Virginie, in a final act of propriety, not wishing to undress for a sailor who promises to carry her ashore should she submit, drowns when her ship is dashed upon the rocks during a hurricane. Paul is injured in an attempt to reach the ship and subsequently succumbs to a profound grief and, unable to rouse himself from the extreme sense of loss, dies soon after. Virginie becomes the novel’s embodiment of resistance, unwilling to succumb to the corruption of France, represented by the sailors, proving the possibility of virtue as formed in a societal model removed from the decadence of domestic mores.

Always drawn to resistance and challenge, Williams, taking her cue from Bernardin’s subversive prose, establishes the idiosyncratic and progressive style of translating fiction later to be more fully realised in her translation of *The Leper of the City of Aoste* (1817). Experimental and highly creative, she operates a style at once faithful and liberal. Her pen, as she states in her preface, always ‘accustomed to follow[ing] the impulse of [her] feelings’, she reserved the translator’s prerogative, choosing a faithful path in some instances whilst at others flying freely, exercising her poetic and socio-political wings.¹⁰⁶ Her creativity is most clearly seen in the interpolation of her own sonnets into the texts, but is often to be found throughout in more discreet instances, for example, in the notable omissions. Williams, as so often in her translation, in *Paul and Virginia* well-deserves the mantle *traduttrice/traditrice*.

¹⁰⁵ Dinah Birch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 120

¹⁰⁶ Helen Maria Williams, *Paul and Virginia, Translated from the French of Bernardin Saint-Pierre* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), p. v.

‘My heart instructs me how to write.’¹⁰⁷ So Williams affirmed in her, ‘Epistle to Dr Moore’. One might argue that just as often it was her ear, as Williams instinct for the music of poetic language clearly guides her choices. From the outset her feeling is guided by her attention to poetic sound. Her choice of ‘Point of Endeavour’, for example, for the ‘coin de Mire’ of the original, an islet off Mauritius illustrates the point.¹⁰⁸ A seemingly arbitrary, and inaccurate, rendering of the islet now known as Coin du Mire or Gunner’s Quoin (*coin/quoin* = place; *mire*: target/sight therefore a gunner’s point more accurately), Williams’s choice harmonises well with other names mentioned in the novel’s opening paragraph: ‘Height of Discovery’, ‘Bay of the Tomb’, ‘Cape of Misfortune’.¹⁰⁹ Her ear, attentive to the instruction of the heart, continues as her guide, creating and suggesting mood with linguistic adornments to the more flatly rationalist prose of the original. Williams’s ‘hollow murmurs’ are a suitably evocative enhancement of Bernardin’s bare description of ‘le bruit’, the *noise* or *sound* of the winds. Alongside this description we have the ‘tumultuous dashing’ of the waves, for Bernardin’s ‘fracas des vagues’, simply *crash* or *din*.¹¹⁰ In the same paragraph Williams appends several adjectives which add depth to the otherwise perfunctory prose Bernardin employs in describing the same objects. ‘Large’ clumps of trees with ‘majestic’ tops grow in the ‘rifted’ sides of the ‘rude’, steep rocks.¹¹¹ Allowing, and by her self-interpolation, inscribing her own freedom, Williams continues with descriptions of the majestic treetops as a place ‘where the clouds seem to repose’, creating the ‘vivid’ colours of rainbows.¹¹² These may seem inconsequential amendments, but however trivial they may appear, they show Williams’s libertarian taste for a more Romantic, figurative linguistic style and the liberty she felt in translating, showing her sense of agency in her translational visibility.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *Poems* (1786), p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, *P & V*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *P & V*, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Williams, *P & V* p. 2.

¹¹¹ Williams, *P & V*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹² Williams, *P & V*, p. 3.

In addition, there are resonances of Wordsworth's taste for poetic recasting to be found in the same paragraph. Williams renders Bernardin's 'des cabanes', 'the cabins', where 'on n'entend plus aucun bruit', 'we hear not a single sound' (my trans.), as the 'ruined cottages', where 'all is calm and still'.¹¹³ These cottages have been referred to as the 'ruins of two small cottages' in the opening lines of the translation and the syntactical proximity of the words 'ruined cottages' to Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage* (1797), rather than 'cabins' echoes profoundly with intertextual connections between the two writers and their works.. As will be discussed, this minor addition may have had significant bearing on Wordsworth's work, despite his possibly disingenuous statements as to the provenance of ideas.¹¹⁴ Additions of this type abound in Williams's version of Bernardin and again, whilst this modification appears slight, it is important as an illustration of Williams's will to create at all levels of the text, at the expense of textual fidelity, and of the imposition of her *self* into the work.

Williams's presence is most obviously felt in the interpolated sonnets. There has been much critical attention devoted recently to the imposition of the sonnets, the locations at which Williams is most visible in the text. Whilst there is some disagreement as to Williams's textual visibility, intentional or otherwise, there is agreement as to the sonnets' function and significance. Kirkley puts it well in stating that 'the invariably awkward introduction of the sonnets disrupts the flow of the prose, calling attention to Williams's translational interventionism.'¹¹⁵ Sigler would seem to concur, arguing that the translation 'presents itself as a kind of strategic self-effacement, a gesture undercut by the constant intrusion of sonnets into the narrative.'¹¹⁶ Anna Barker reminds us that this type of interpolation was not entirely new for Williams. She had done the same thing in her novel, *Julia*, in which she had placed

¹¹³ Williams, *P & V*, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ 'In summer 1803 W denied borrowing the idea of *Poems on the Naming of Places* from *Paul et Virginie*.' See Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770 – 1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 121.

¹¹⁵ Kirkley, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ Sigler, p. 580.

the poem, 'The Bastille, A Vision'. Echoing the jarring interruptions of the discovery of the sonnets within what purports to be a direct translation of Bernardin's original work, Kennedy questions the anomaly of the inclusion; 'the poem on the Bastille seems an odd intrusion on the main story.'¹¹⁷ However, in the same way as with the *Paul and Virginia* sonnets, Kennedy argues that the imposition 'also reflects the imprisoning and tortuous condition of the novel's love triangle.'¹¹⁸ The use of poetry to reflect and enhance recondite narrative layers was a favoured tool of Williams and in *Julia*, shows her role as mediator even, in this case, between dimensions of her own text.

I suggest that the *Paul and Virginia* sonnets can be read as mediatory tools and as sites of integration. The poems represent locations in which Williams interposes her mode of sensibility, based in a contemporary British tradition, into a work which explores Rousseau-influenced, French philosophy, thus creating a liminal space of emotion or of a psychological interiority with which a British readership might more readily assimilate, or at least approach, foreign ideas. At the same time, Williams demonstrates her desire for self-inscription, maintaining, if masked behind the veil of the characters which ostensibly produce the poems, her visibility as the text's gatekeeper and semi-creator. However, once again we must attempt to understand this strategy in more than one way.

The Preface provides Williams with the middle ground from which to claim a level of authorship of the work, whilst at the same time denying any claims as to her originating authorship. Making a distinction between French and British readership and hinting at British superiority, Williams assures her British audience that she has respected the rules by which a national artist must perform. The 'serious and reflecting Englishman', she flatters, requires action, a 'rapid succession of incidents [...] without suffering the author to appear himself,

¹¹⁷ Kennedy, p. 50

¹¹⁸ Kennedy, p. 50

and stop the progress of the story.’¹¹⁹ A case, perhaps, of the lady protesting too much. The claim is duplicitous as, of course, this is exactly what Williams does with the sonnets, interrupting the narrative flow to announce, ‘je suis là!’, or ‘here I am’, metaphorically killing Bernardin in a Barthesian erasement of his authorship. The preface is again a betrayal or, at least, an act of subterfuge. Her literary sleight-of-hand belies the true nature of her praxis, and in this sense the preface itself represents a mode of foreignisation, of alienation, leading the unsuspecting British reader into unfamiliar territory.

Williams at once creates and denies, honours and betrays, a practice exhibited in her writing, in translation and in other, more political writing throughout her residence in France. The omission of Napoleon’s name from the *Ode to Peace* is a good example. Williams’s Orwellian removal of Napoleon from the poetic and historical record in her celebration of the 1802 Anglo-French accord of the Peace of Amiens is striking in its imposition of self into the narrative of contemporary politics and of history. With the additional sonnets, Williams momentarily abandons Bernardin’s template and reclaims her liminal space, revealing her agency in the process of translation as a shadowy presence, occasionally appearing in focus, she confuses the reader as to the translation’s undecidable status as an original, non-original.

Williams is not always keen to offer strangeness, wishing at times to travel homeward her mediation requires infidelity to achieve domestication. Whilst the sonnets have been the focus of increased attention, the, less-explored omissions show Williams’s willingness to compromise and to make choices according to her notional intended readership. The frequency with which she exercises this level of control once again proves the dynamism of the process. This was not an exercise in mechanical transcription.

¹¹⁹ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

Williams opts for the prosaic, chaste even, ‘Three Peaks’ to render a mountain recorded by Bernardin as the ‘trois Mamelles’, *three mammaries* or, better, *breasts*.¹²⁰ Bernardin appends a lengthy explanatory footnote, the entire detail of which is absent from Williams’s version, representing the first substantial omission and one which meets the criteria of the preface, omitting that which ‘would be passed over with impatience by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative.’¹²¹ Leaving aside the question as to whether Williams’s sonnets do not themselves representing striking interruptions to the narrative, the note on the *trois Mamelles* certainly qualifies as a general observation. Bernardin clearly felt it necessary to explain the term:

Il y a beaucoup de montagnes dont les sommets sont arrondis en forme des mamelles, et qui en portent le nom dans toutes les langues. Ce sont en effet des veritables mamelles; car ce sont d’elles que découlent beaucoup de rivières et de ruisseaux, qui répandent l’abondance sur la terre. Elles sont les sources des principaux fleuves qui l’arrosent, et elles fournissent constamment à leurs eaux, en attirant sans cesse les nuages autour du piton de rocher, qui le surmonte à leur centre comme un mamelon. Nous avons indiqué ces prévoyances admirables de la nature dans nos études précédants.

There are many mountains of whom the summits are rounded in the form of breasts, and who bear the name in all languages. They are, in fact, truly breasts, for it from them that spring forth many rivers and streams, which spread abundance over the earth. They are the source of the major rivers which water the ground, and they provide a constant supply to their waters, in continuously drawing clouds around the peak of the rock, which tops their centre like a nipple. We have indicated these admirable foresights of nature in our previous studies.¹²²

The noun *mamelle*, had been used in a famous expression by Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully (1559-1640), Henry IV’s Minister of Finance, an expression with which Bernardin would no doubt have been familiar: ‘Labourage et pâturage sont les deaux mamelles de la

¹²⁰ Williams, *P & V*, p. 43.

¹²¹ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

¹²² Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Didot, 1789), p. 39, n. 1.; my trans.

France.’ ‘Plowing and pasture are the two breasts of France.’ (Fr.)¹²³ Despite its currency in contemporary France, however, Williams chose not to include this section of Bernardin’s prose perhaps indicating, if not a personal prudery, a sensitivity to the problematic reception such a description of feminine physicality may create in England. In accordance with Williams’s project of dissemination towards a positive Anglo-assimilation of literary Frenchness, she here opts for a path of least resistance in a mediation which precludes offence providing a justification of xenophobia based on national stereotype. She does not allow her readership here to form a negative response of the French as inherently highly-sexualised and thereby morally unsound. Indeed, she does not allow her readers any formation of response at all. *Tradittrice/dittatura*, indeed. Translator as dictator may be a more appropriate designation for Williams here.

Further omissions include, consistent with Williams’s prefatory remarks, lists of animals fished by the inhabitants, ‘des cabots, des polypes, des rougets, des langoustes, des chevrettes¹²⁴, des crabs, des ousins, des huitres et des coquillages de toute espèce.’ (‘Grey Mullet, polyps, red mullet, crayfish, shrimp, crab, sea urchins, oysters, and shellfish of all species’). Again, Williams defines the parameters of reception for her British readership of aspects of French language and culture. Difficulty in translating these terms may have necessitated a further decision as to the possible reception of the unpalatable foreignness of some of the items mentioned. This type of information could promote or provoke, once again, prejudice to follow based on perceived national characteristics.

Williams continues to dictate reception, betraying the original, but faithful to her preface’s design, omitting large sections from around the novel’s mid-point on. She excises entirely a

¹²³ ‘Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully’, Archives de France, <
<http://www.archivesdefrance.culture.gouv.fr/action-culturelle/celebrations-nationales/brochure-2010/vie-politique/duc-de-sully>> [Accessed 15/12/15].

¹²⁴ NB. This appears to be a typographical error in the original text. The word is more likely, *crevettes* as a *chevrette* in this context is a small she-goat. Williams may have had difficulty with *cabots*, *rougets*, and *chevrettes* here as the two mullet species are difficult to translate without possessing detailed vocabulary of sea creatures.

section from page 145 to 147 of *Paul et Virginie* and the whole of p. 149 from Bernardin's original. The first of these is an interesting choice. The piece is a long digression on the necessity of solitude for the health of the soul and contains many future echoes of the investigation of the life of solitude in Xavier de Maistre's *Lépreux de la cité d'Aoste* (1811). Containing some beautiful prose, it is a shame that we do not have Williams's rendering with which to draw comparison and examine her interpretation. In the midst of societies, divided by so much prejudice, Bernardin states, 'l'ame est dans une agitation continuelle; elle roule sans cesse en elle-même mille opinions turbulentes et contradictoires', 'the soul is in a constant state of agitation, endlessly turning over inside itself thousands of turbulent and contradictory opinions.'¹²⁵ Thus, the necessity for solitude, in order to calm the troubled soul. 'Mais dans la solitude', declares Bernardin, 'elle dépose ces illusions étrangères qui la troublent'. 'But in solitude, she puts down those strange illusions which trouble her.'¹²⁶ It is unusual that Williams should have chosen to ignore a piece which seems to reflect so much her own situation, her preface after all describes how she had used the translation process as a means of mental escape from the turbulent milieu of post-revolutionary Paris under Robespierre's administration:

The following translation of 'Paul and Virginia' was written at Paris, amidst the horrors of Robespierre's tyranny. During that gloomy epocha it was difficult to find occupations which might cheat the days of calamity of their weary length [...] In this situation I gave myself the task of employing a few hours every day to translating the charming little novel of Bernardin St. Pierre [...] and I found most soothing relief in wandering from my own gloomy reflections to those enchanting scenes of the Mauritius.¹²⁷

Solitude, and literature, had afforded Williams respite from contemporary events, enough to soothe her savage breast and momentarily put aside the *strange illusions which trouble*[d]

¹²⁵ Bernardin, p. 146.; my trans.

¹²⁶ Bernardin, p. 146.; my trans.

¹²⁷ Williams, *P & V*, p. iii-vii.

her. Literature is profoundly important. She acknowledges as much by retaining and translating a section towards the end of *Paul et Virginie*, in one of the novel's most lavish sections of prose.

La vertu, repris-je, toujours égale, constante, invariable, n'est pas le partage de l'homme. Au milieu de tant de passions qui nous agitent, notre raison se trouble et s'obscurcit ; mais il est des phares où nous pouvons en rallumer le flambeau : ce sont les lettres.¹²⁸

Williams translates this as the following:

Equal, constant, and invariable virtue,' I replied, 'belongs not to man. In the midst of so many passions, by which we are agitated, our reason is disordered and obscured: but there is an ever-burning lamp, at which we can rekindle its flame: and that is, literature.'¹²⁹

Her experience of Paris under the Terror, of the daily violence and paranoia, was of such strange illusions as that of her witnessing the corruption of her cherished revolutionary ideals and that of seeing many of her Girondin friends imprisoned or sent to the guillotine in Robespierre's purges. Perhaps, then, the preface prefigures the part of the novel concerning solitude and serves as a translation *hors-texte*, to invoke (and to contradict) Derrida for a moment, there is *something* outside the text here, the sense at least of Williams's assimilation of the message and modification into lines of her preface.

However, this still leaves a question as to why she should omit a contemplation on solitude, whilst retaining that which addresses the restorative power of literature. I suggest, perhaps, a realm of between-ness, a zone *parmi-textes* (among-texts) or, rather, *entre-textes* (between-texts) in which aspects of implicitly and explicitly stated translation mingle and combine with extra-textual prose (such as the preface and omissions) making the translation a multi-dimensional holistic entity.

¹²⁸ Bernardin, p. 212.

¹²⁹ Williams, *P & V*, p. 167.

We can say for certain that that which remains most assuredly *Dedans-texte*, within the text, is that which related to the power of books. Bernardin offers the following:

Les lettres, mon fils, sont un secours du ciel. Ce sont des rayons de cette sagesse qui gouverne l'univers, que l'homme, inspiré par un art céleste, a appris à fixer sur la terre. Sembables aux rayons du soleil, elles éclairent, elles réjouissent, elles échauffent ; c'est un feu divin. Comme le feu, elles approprient toute la nature à notre usage. Par elles nous réunissons autour de nous les choses, les lieux, les hommes et les temps. Ce sont elles qui nous rappellent aux règles de la vie humaine. Elles calment les passions ; elles répriment les vices ; elles excitent les vertus par les exemples augustes des gens de bien qu'elles célèbrent, et dont elles nous présentent les images toujours honorées. Ce sont des filles du ciel qui descendent sur la terre pour charmer les maux du genre humain. Les grands écrivains qu'elles inspirent ont toujours paru dans les temps les plus difficiles à supporter à toute société, les temps de barbarie et ceux de dépravation. Mon fils, les lettres ont consolé une infinité d'hommes plus malheureux que vous : Xénophon, exilé de sa patrie après y avoir ramené dix mille Grecs ; Scipion l'Africain, lassé des calomnies de Romains ; Lucullus, de leurs brigues ; Catinat, de l'ingratitude de sa cour. Les Grecs, si ingénieux, avaient réparti à chacune de Muses qui président aux lettres une partie de notre entendement, pour le gouverner : nous devons donc leur donner nos passions à régir, afin qu'elles leur imposent un joug et un frein. Elles doivent remplir, par rapport aux puissances de notre âme, les mêmes fonctions que les Heures qui attelaient et conduisaient les chevaux du Soleil.

Lisez donc, mon fils. Les sages qui ont écrit avant nous sont des voyageurs qui nous ont précédés dans les sentiers de l'infortune, qui nous tendent la main, et nous invitent à nous joindre à leur compagnie lorsque tout nous abandonne. Un bon livre est un bon ami.¹³⁰

This finely-wrought passage is expertly translated by Williams, if again somewhat dictatorially (she is faithful to her preface and omits the list of great writers of antiquity for fear of British boredom) by Williams as the following:

Literature, my dear son, is the gift of Heaven; a ray of that wisdom which governs the universe; and which man, inspired by celestial intelligence, has drawn down to earth. Like the sun, it enlightens, it rejoices, it warms, with a divine flame, and seems, in some sort, like the element of fire, to bend all nature to our use. By the aid of literature, we bring round us all things, all places, men, and times. By its aid we calm the passions, suppress vice, and excite virtue. Literature is the daughter of heaven, who has descended upon earth to soften and calm all human evils.

Have recourse to your books then, my son. The sages who have written before our days, are travelers who have preceded us in the paths of misfortune; who stretch out a

¹³⁰ Bernardin, pp. 213-4

friendly hand towards us, and invite us to join their society, when every thing [*sic.*] else abandons us. A good book is a good friend.¹³¹

Paul and Virginia was indeed a good book; a good friend given to Williams by her good friend, Bernardin, during the tumultuous time she spent in Paris in 1793-95. The personification of literature as a companion, and furthermore as spiritual conduit to all history and philosophy, a centrality perhaps, is fitting for Williams. The entire passage can also be seen as a discreet mode of radical propaganda (radical in the sense of a challenge to the Parisian administration) at a time when reading was seen as such a subversive, therefore dangerous, activity.¹³² The advocating of reading towards enlightenment seems a call-to-arms, at least a call-to-question, and the gendered notion of *les lettres* as a feminine plural is interesting. Williams maintains the feminine in her rendering, an unnecessary loyalty in the sense that it is normal practice to translate French terms for concepts as gender neutral. In this regard, Williams was forced by Bernardin's construction to personify the term (*Ce sont les filles du ciel*) but she could have said simply, 'It is the child of heaven'. Instead she restates the charged term *literature*, and reinscribes the female to the term: 'Literature is the daughter of heaven', thus reinscribing herself, once again, into the text, but more importantly suggesting that it is the woman writer more generally who has 'descended upon the earth to soften and calm all human ills.' If this seems a re-statement of received opinion as to the nature of womanhood as representing that which is softer and more palliative, perhaps so, but I would rather suggest that Williams positions herself here as the personification of literature itself/herself. Her ability to soften and to calm through writing comes from painful experience of immediate socio-political turmoil and hard-won liberation. She is, herself, the traveller 'who has preceded us in the paths of misfortune.' As champion of a revolutionist sense of liberty and universalist notions of language and society we, or more pertinently, her domestic

¹³¹ Williams, *P & V*, pp. 167-8.

¹³² See Preface.

readership should seek the knowledge contained in her, and others', books in order to achieve enlightenment.

There is a lot more besides the *Letters from France* which remains *hors-texte*, or to extend my thesis of textual liminality *entre-textes*. The text in the sections of Bernardin's novel which follow the remarks on literature are omitted by Williams, who decides not to grant them the Benjaminian afterlife of most of the remainder of the work. Williams opts to let these parts rest, although they remain in Bernardin, meaning they exist as spectral sections, residing somewhere between the translations, perhaps, in a space outside the text or among the two. In order to make this suggestion, of course, one needs both texts. One could not say, reading only Williams's translation, for example, that their presence is felt, nor that they have ceased to be in a reading of just the original. However, this is one of the paradoxes of translation, that an omission is not a complete erasure. The travelling text, having existed in the source text but not having reached the target, must reside somewhere in between, in a metaphysical sense. Williams is the ideal mediator of such liminality, in many respects the embodiment of such a process.

That which she leaves outside in the larger sections which follow would appear to be a choice once again based reception in Britain. There is another large omission, pages 159-65 in Bernardin, a section discussing ancient regime venality and moral corruption, which it is clear Williams felt would be unsuitable for her British audience. Although, again, it would seem something of a dereliction on her part in terms of her transportation of French thought across the channel. Perhaps the idea was not to promote further means of prejudicing British attitudes, already hardened towards the enemy in the Revolutionary Wars, later to transmogrify into the Napoleonic Wars following the peace of Amiens in 1802. We could suggest, once again with reference to the duplicity of the preface, that Williams believes a hierarchical relationship exists between France and Britain, at least regarding a general

readership, with the British the less politically conscious nation. Living, she would later recall, ‘Chez ceux qui sentent vivement les principes, les principes deviennent les passions.’ (‘Among those [the French] with a profound sense of principles, principles become passions’).¹³³ To paraphrase her preface, the English are bored by politics and philosophy, they require action in their literature, whilst the ‘Frenchman listens attentively to long philosophical reflections.’¹³⁴ If so, and if Williams is such an agent of change, why not provide the commentary on contemporary French political history contained in pages 159-65? Again she betrays both Bernardin’s source text and her British readership in not allowing them reception of discussions of this type. She continues to excise similar discussions over the following several pages, making a sizeable chunk of the original unavailable to those encountering the text only in translation. Bernardin describes Williams’s position and her power as textual gate-keeper and aesthetic arbiter perfectly in this part of the text: ‘Les femmes sont fausses dans les pays où les homes sont tyrans’, ‘women are false in the places where men are tyrants.’¹³⁵ Williams is false indeed, in the country where Robespierre is tyrant. Her preface falsely praises her British readership, whilst guarding notions of French intellectual superiority and she betrays the political consciousness, to an extent of her friend, Bernardin’s novel.

As we have seen, engagement with literature in solitude allowed Williams psychological travel from the daily troubles of Paris life. Books could also be dangerously powerfully, as she notes in the preface. Speaking of the time under Robespierre when ‘writing was forbidden employment’, she recalls that:

¹³³ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 3.

¹³⁴ Williams, *P & V*, p. x.

¹³⁵ Bernardin, p. 173.

Even reading had its perils; for books had sometimes aristocratical insignia, and sometimes counter revolutionary allusions: and when the administrators of police happened to think the writer a conspirator, they punished the reader as his accomplice.¹³⁶

Reading itself was, then, as dangerous act, and the reading of proscribed texts could result in the most severe punishment. The translation does in some respects represent an act of civil defiance in particular with regard to Williams's sonnets, full of the language of sentiment, to the culture of reason enforced by Robespierre and the Committee for Public Safety. Williams's commitment to the expression of human sympathy throughout her translation is the means of her expression of political sentiment at a time when such writing *per se* was strictly forbidden, particularly if it was deemed in any way critical of the regime. The use of the work as an escape from contemporary social horrors can also be seen as a political act. The very intention to escape contemplation of what, for Robespierre *et al*, was the necessary path of progress towards the true society of liberty and virtue is an act of subversion and is counter-revolutionary in its defiance of defined and enforced mental paradigms. The post-revolutionary government, acting as a kind of proto-thought-police regulating the very act of reading, by extension, restricted the capacity for philosophical contemplation and debate even at the level of internalized analysis within the individual.

Williams is driven to produce art in a country now governed and culturally-informed by arms, not to achieve fame or reward, but to escape the suffocating psychological restrictions placed upon the human subject by an increasingly intolerant tyrannical administration. The act of writing, as instructed by the formulations of the heart formed by the ear into poetry and often musical prose, is essential for Williams in maintaining a degree of mental autonomy and thereby reinforcing her understanding of liberty itself. Reading, as a means of assimilating ideas, therefore the means of supplying reason with its fundamental energy, is

¹³⁶ Williams, *P & V*, p. vi.

vital to the formulation of philosophy and ideology based upon an understanding of feeling. Reason without sensibility is inert, as it ignores vital aspects of human interaction and connection and clearly leads, in the case of the Terror, to the denial of humanity and the most horrific, inhumane behaviours. Whilst Bernardin's novel has been an acceptable text for Williams to read, she has read it in a very different way to that which the authorities might have deemed acceptable. Williams has learned to read through and beyond the text on the page and in her poetry and political writing invites her readers to do likewise.

Wordsworth was one such reader. In *The Ruined Cottage*, he takes up this theme of reading beyond and explores the nature of reception, particularly in terms of the comprehension of signs, specifically those offered by the natural world. The poem is reminiscent of Williams's translation of Bernardin and assimilates many of the ideas contained in Williams's Preface.

Duncan Wu provides useful detail as to Wordsworth's encountering the text:

Williams' translation of St Pierre's novel was in print by July 1796 and W probably read it soon after. Jonathan Wordsworth tells me that W's copy survives in a private collection in England, and contains an ownership inscription dating from 1796-7. This makes Racedown the most likely place for W's first reading of *Paul and Virginia*, which is consistent with the argument that it influenced *The Ruined Cottage*. It was serialized in the *Weekly Entertainer*, 27 Feb.-29 May 1797, at a time when W was reading the *Entertainer* regularly.¹³⁷

Wordsworth was clearly familiar with Williams's translation of Bernardin's novel and many of the novel's characteristics are to be found in *The Ruined Cottage*. The first and most obvious example of the reception of *Paul and Virginia* is Wordsworth's choice of narration. The poem has two narrators, that of the initial poet-narrator and also, in a characterization resounding with echoes of Bernardin, an old man who recounts the sad story-within-a-story. According to Kennedy, '*The Ruined Cottage*, composed in 1797, uses a similar narrative structure, with a story being told by an old man about a family that used to live in a now

¹³⁷ Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770 – 1799*, p. 120.

abandoned spot.’¹³⁸ Wordsworth’s narrator is strikingly similar to that of Bernardin and the figure is used by Wordsworth not only in the recounting of the melancholy tale concerning the cottage’s erstwhile tenants, but also as a guide to the codes of nature which underlie human interaction and which must be read in order to effect social change.

A melancholic tale of human suffering, the poem’s primary narration is a retelling by the shamanistic Pedlar, a character indebted to the old man of the island who recounts the sad story of Paul and Virginie. Wordsworth’s story recounts the history of the family previously occupying the titular cottage and in particular, Margaret, the wife of Robert, a man driven by poverty to enlist in the army, never returning and thus leaving Margaret a war-widow. In her sorrow Margaret descends into a state of atrophy, neglecting the welfare of her children, whose subsequent deaths lead finally to her own demise. Ostensibly, as in the case of *Paul et Virginie*, a simple tale of anguish and abandonment, the poem reveals a much deeper investigation into several of the themes with which Wordsworth was experimenting at this time: poverty, social injustice, war, causality, and fundamental metaphysical relationships between man, Nature, and the exploration of the human psyche. As Wu suggests, ‘where *Salisbury Plain* was essentially an anti-war poem, *Adventures* exposed the iniquities of the world from a rationalist perspective, and *The Borderers* was geared to revising Godwinism, the new work [*The Ruined Cottage*] transcends the concerns of politics and philosophy, and settles on the thing that had always fascinated Wordsworth, and which would provide his central subjects for the rest of his career: emotional and psychological truth.’¹³⁹ Just as Bernardin’s seemingly simple tale of the island idyll reveals investigations into contemporary political-philosophical truths, developed by Williams into a broader exploration of sympathy and evocation of human emotion, Wordsworth’s project having assimilated Williams’s work

¹³⁸ Kennedy, p. 123.

¹³⁹ Duncan Wu, ‘Wordsworth’s Poetry to 1798’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed by Stephen Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003) 22-37, p. 22.

is to develop the use of similar characterizations in order to achieve the poetic exploration of recondite psychological truths. In this sense, *The Ruined Cottage* becomes a Romantic response to *Paul and Virginia* with Wordsworth as its Romantic reader. 'The narrative', Wu states, 'is actually driven by Wordsworth's preoccupation with [the widow's] interior world.'¹⁴⁰ Wordsworth, as the Romantic reader of *Paul and Virginia* receives the novel's themes, characters and symbols and reproduces them in a Romantic investigation of the interior world of the subject. Sensibility is the language which evokes sympathy in the reader and drives Wordsworth to develop the analysis of his contemporary milieu towards a portrayal of the human subject imbued with psychological depth. This remains a political gesture as it attempts to attribute a humanity, and a radical sensitivity, to the lower orders of society equal to the emotional and, therefore rational, capabilities of those governing cultural and political mores at the other end of the societal spectrum.

The poem was not published until 1814 when it appeared as Book I of *The Excursion*¹⁴¹, when it was dismissed with the famous calumny of Francis Jeffrey's, 'This will never do!'¹⁴² Described by Jeffrey as, 'a tissue of moral and devotional ravings', the work was similarly criticised a few years later by John Wilson in *Blackwood's* as dealing 'almost unmercifully, with misguided sensibilities and perverted passions.'¹⁴³ Wordsworth, like Williams, could not avoid the siren-like calling of art. As he wrote in the poem of 'The poets', he remained, like Williams, 'Obedient to the strong creative power / Of human passion.' (I. 67-79)

One is reminded of similar criticisms levelled at Williams, particularly in the case of *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, in which she was praised for her technical skill, whilst damned for

¹⁴⁰ Wu, in Gill, p. 33.

¹⁴¹ Jonathan Wordsworth published the first fully edited and annotated edition in 1985 from a manuscript of 1799 preserved at the Wordsworth Library in Grasmere and printed as manuscript in 1969.

¹⁴² Francis Jeffrey, 'The Excursion; being a portion of the Recluse, a Poem: in *Edinburgh Review*, November 1814 in *Contemporary Reviews of Romantic Poetry*, ed by John Wain (London: George G. Harrap, 1970), p. 75.

¹⁴³ John Wilson, 'Digression on Wordsworth in Review of Crabbe's *Tales of the Hall; Blackwood's*, July 1819, in Wain (London: George G. Harrap, 1970) pp. 58-9.

her choice of subject. Jeffrey's commentary on *The Excursion* might well have been applied to Williams in this respect:

We must say, that there is very considerable pathos in the telling of this simple story; and that they who can get over the repugnance excited by the triteness of its incidents, and the lowness of its objects, will not fail to be struck with the author's knowledge of the human heart, and the power he possesses in stirring up its deepest and gentlest sympathies.¹⁴⁴

Despite their mutual self-inscription, one might equally substitute Wordsworth's name for Williams's in Jonathan Wordsworth's statement that, 'belonging to the same tradition of sensibility and yearning for the naturalness that she describes, Williams is as free from self-consciousness as Bernardin himself.'¹⁴⁵ *The Ruined Cottage* is a work free from the poetic self-examination of *Tintern Abbey* yet at the same time contains a shadowy author's presence and explores the modes of sensibility and naturalness which so characterize Williams's translation of Bernardin's novel.

John Wilson, who had apparently formed a less-favourable opinion of Wordsworth by 1819, had previously praised him in a rebuttal of Jeffrey's continued criticism as having 'brought about a *revolution* in Poetry.' 'Posterity', Wilson insisted, would 'hail him as a regenerator and a creator.'¹⁴⁶ Indeed posterity has hailed Wordsworth as a great creator. We are concerned here with his status as a regenerator, Frankensteinian architect of the text's palingenesis. In the case of Paul and Virginia, Wordsworth regenerates themes, characters, and literary devices, reinterpreting the translation and furthering the dialogic continuation with Williams.

¹⁴⁴ Jeffrey, in Wain, ed., pp. 78-9.

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Wordsworth, ed., *Paul and Virginia* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989), p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ John Wilson, 'Vindication of Mr. Wordsworth's Letter to Mr. Gray, on a new edition of Burns: *Blackwood's*, October 1817', in, Wain, ed., p. 84.

In a thematic sense, *The Ruined Cottage* mirrors Bernardin in the text's promotion of the (lost) ability to read landscape and the immediate environment for signs of recondite truths, the passage of time, for example; death, grief, and guilt. 'I see around me here / Things which you cannot see', says Wordsworth's narrator. (III. 67-8)¹⁴⁷ It is through a natural hermeneutics that sympathy and an improved morality can be achieved. Margaret, the cottage and surroundings become the text(s) from which nature can be read, with the Pedlar as its prophet-like interpreter.

The poem's opening lines set the scene in a description resounding with similarities to Bernardin and Williams:

Twas summer and the sun was mounted high;
 Along the south and uplands feebly glared
 Through a pale stream, and all the northern downs,
 In clearer air ascending, showed far off
 Their surfaces with shadows dappled o'er
 Of deep embattled clouds. Far as in the sight
 Could reach those many shadows lay in spots
 Determined and unmoved, with steady beams
 Of clear and pleasant sunshine interposed (I. 1-9)¹⁴⁸

Williams, from Bernardin, describes the place in the opening paragraphs of *Paul and Virginia* as the following:

Within this inclosure [sic] reigns the most profound silence. The waters, the air, all the elements are at peace. Scarcely does the echo repeat the whispers of the palm-trees spreading their broad leaves, the long points of which are gently balanced by the winds. A soft light illuminates the bottom of this deep valley, on which the sun only shines at noon. But even at break of day, the rays of light are thrown on the surrounding rocks, and their sharp peaks rising above the shadows of the mountain, appear like tints of gold and purple gleaming upon the azure sky.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Williams Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage* in *William Wordsworth: Selected Poems*, ed by Damian Walford Davies (London: J. M. Dent, 1994), p. 40. NB. All references from the poem are taken from this edition and cited within the text.

¹⁴⁸ Williams Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *P & V*, pp. 3-4.

Wordsworth's picture is the less comforting of the two, his 'embattled clouds' rumble ominously and hint at the difficulties to be recounted later. The opening sequence is, however, very reminiscent of Williams's version of Bernardin. This is not the first example of Wordsworth's reception of Williams, as Wu shows:

there are a number of borrowings from Williams in *The Vale of Esthwaite* (1787). At one point W describes the fleece of sheep 'seen / Between the Boughs of *sombrous* green' (*D.C. MS 3 6v*; *De Selincourt* 69-70). Williams uses the same word to describe the shade of the Peruvian foliage: 'Thro' the lone vale, or forest's *sombrous* shade / A dreary solitude, the mourner stray'd...' (*Peru* vi 55-6).¹⁵⁰

The Pedlar is introduced, once again in lines strikingly similar to both Bernardin and Williams: 'And near the door I saw an aged man / Alone and stretched upon the cottage bench; / An iron-pointed staff lay at his side.' (l. 33-35). The aspect of the staff is the most inviting symbol for the character's interpretation as moral guide, a Moses-like trope filled with attributes of age, wisdom, and prophetic knowledge. This comes directly from Bernardin and is well-translated in Williams:

Un jour que j'étais assis au pied des cabanes, et que j'en considérais les ruines, un homme déjà sur l'âge vint à passer [sic] aux environs. Il était suivant la coutume des anciens habitants, en petite veste et en long caleçon. Il marchait nu-pieds, et s'appuyait sur un bâton de bois d'ébène.¹⁵¹

One day, when I was seated at the foot of the cottages, and contemplating their ruins, a man advanced in years, passed near the spot. He was dressed in the ancient garb of the island, his feet were bare, and he leaned upon a staff of ebony.¹⁵²

This introduction, which continues with a description of his white hair and 'dignified and interesting' countenance comparable to the 'pride of nature', the 'venerable Armytage' of Wordsworth's poem creates a unified image in the reader's mind of the sage and master. It is this guardian of the secrets of the nature who can evoke the necessary sympathy in his reader (or listener in this case), the poet-narrator in order for the man to truly understand and

¹⁵⁰ Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading*, p. 149.

¹⁵¹ Bernardin, p. 110.

¹⁵² Williams, *P & V*, p. 4.

empathise with the interior torment of Margaret and thereby effect an alteration in human relationships through his subsequent actions.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity with *The Ruined Cottage* and *Paul and Virginia* is also to be found in these opening sections of each work. The initial narrator of each has come across the ruins of a previously inhabited space and is met by an old man who will go on to retell the story of the previous dwellers. The cottage, or cottages in the case of Bernardin, is the physical place from whence the story can be told and the time-weathered and atrophied state of the structure itself becomes the most apposite representation of the decline of the family and, in particular of Margaret's mental and emotional self. The old man in Williams states that 'The curiosity of mankind is only attracted by the history of the great; and yet from that knowledge little use can be derived.'¹⁵³ Truly useful knowledge, for Williams and in turn for Wordsworth derives from the understanding of the untold stories, the small and seemingly insignificant interior quotidian histories of those touched by pain and strife, for it is only through an understanding of suffering that fellow-feeling can be fully realised.

But, as suggested by Wordsworth's, and Williams's, critics, why should the reader care about such a subject? Indeed, 'why should a tear be in an old man's eye?' (l. 188-198) The old man's tears are a reminder of the tears which close Bernardin's novel and, particularly in the case of Williams when considered with her sonnets in their concentration on the essential power of pain, the crying serves as the image with which the reader is left at the novel's close. The book's final line reminds the reader that the shedding of tears is good; it is a moral act based upon a comprehension of one's own emotional self and an ability to comprehend the pain of others. Sympathy finds its visible, readable aspect in tears: 'En disant ces mots ce bon vieillard s'éloigna en versant des larmes, et les miennes avaient coulé plus d'une fois pendant ce funeste récit.'; 'In saying these words, the good old man retired, shedding tears,

¹⁵³ Williams, *P & V*, pp. 6-7

and mine had often flowed during this melancholy narration.’¹⁵⁴ In her empathic responses to fellow suffering, Williams had always found kinship with revolutionary ideals but it is here where she shows herself at a far remove from the corruptive forces of Robespierre and post-revolutionary authorities.

It is a shame that Williams’s prose here, whilst a faithfully literal translation, is remarkably ungainly when compared other passages, those concerned with literature, for example. Bernardin’s is arguably the linguistically richer in pathos and also in its rhythm and music. However, the point is not lost, that the final image of the book is of a man not afraid to shed tears for those now departed, and to emote at such abstractions as the nature of time, mortality and the weaknesses of humanity. The Pedlar in *The Ruined Cottage* makes use of this melancholy:

But we have known that there is often found
In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,
A power to virtue friendly; Were’t not so
I am a dreamer among men, indeed
An idle dreamer. (II. 227-231)

Just as for Williams, empathy for suffering has the power to nourish virtue. Were this not the case then poets would simply be idle dreamers. The power to virtue is confirmed in the final lines of *The Ruined Cottage* when the poet-narrator, having heard the harrowing story of Margaret’s demise, stops to assess the implications of the story:

I stood, and leaning over the garden gate
Reviewed that woman’s sufferings; and it seemed
To comfort me while with a brother’s love
I blessed her in the impotence of grief.
At length towards the cottage I returned
Fondly, and traced with milder interest
That secret spirit of humanity
Which, mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of Nature, mid her plants, her weeds and flowers,
And silent overgrowings still survived. (II. 497-506)

¹⁵⁴ Bernardin de St-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, p. 248; Williams, *P & V*, p. 212.

The essence of Wordsworth's poetic quest is contained here: the uncovering of the 'secret spirit of humanity' revealed through the profound contemplation of natural symbols assimilated through 'nature and the language of the sense.'¹⁵⁵ This represents the development towards the more personal, unified vision of *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth's lament for the corruption of the French Revolution. The Pedlar gives his final instruction to the poet-narrator here:

My friend, enough of sorrow have you given,
The purposes of wisdom ask no more:
Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
The forms of things with an unworthy eye (II. 508-511)

The section is replete with the language of instruction, purpose, and value and returns us to Williams's insistence on the value of a tear. By reading nature's texts and codes human beings can achieve, for Wordsworth, a complex understanding of fellowship and re-establish severed connections to God, through the attainment of virtue as delivered by the sympathetic contemplation of the suffering of others.

Sympathy is to be valued as the way to virtue and it is through Wordsworth's interpretation of Williams's reading of Bernardin's sensibility that his greatest poetry of this period is developed. Arguably, without Wordsworth's exposure to the story of *Paul and Virginia*, the *chef d'oeuvre* of *Tintern Abbey* could not have been written, for it is clear that *The Ruined Cottage* shows the poetic and psychological direction in which Wordsworth was thinking and writing. The reception of Bernardin de St-Pierre, through the mediation of Williams can be said to have greatly informed, even influenced, the emergent Wordsworthian Romanticism of the late 1790s. In this way, French literature, other than that of more prosaic political writings making their way across the channel, proves to have been of great importance to

¹⁵⁵ Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, in, Gill, ed., p. 134

contemporary philosophical literary experiments. Williams served both: her letters from France provided political commentary whilst her attention to more literary modes such as the novel allowed for a migration, or transportation, of art and culture.

Bernardin's 'charming little novel' provided Williams with the means to escape the horrors of Robespierre's reign, harnessing the power of literature in order to effect self-emancipation. However, the translation also provided Williams with the field on which to play out her ideas regarding the process and its purpose. The translation abounds with these experiments. Sometimes faithful, sometimes creative, sometimes successful, sometimes frustrating, these experiments show Williams as an engaged creative force in the process. To stress the point, translation was far from a process of uninspired and laborious transcription. The task, as traditionally associated with women as quasi-automatons or faceless scribes, was for Williams one of (re)creation and literary endeavour akin to the creation of original poetry. She was a daughter of heaven, in the mould of Wordsworth's 'favoured being', charged with bringing her cast of enlightenment to European readers.

It must be restated, however, that Williams maintained absolute power in her decisions as to finality of form and content of the translated artefact (the omissions remain one of the work's great frustrations). She was, as I have suggested, in many respects omnipotent, a *tradittrice/dittatura*. In this she shares a despotism more readily associated with Napoleon, upon whom *Paul et Virginie* had its influence, not least in the case of his novel. Their coterminous relationship to Bernardin's work reveals interesting lines of intersection in their shared history and common milieu. As mediator of the work, and in a broader sense, of French thought, Williams operated from a position of omniscience in terms of her control of that which would be received. However, reading through and between the texts we can see that there are many instances of occluded presence, over which Williams had little control. In some instances her omissions suggest further interpretations and inter-textualities with her

own preface and with Bernardin's source text, as well as with Wordsworth's *Ruined Cottage*, a work which shows some of the facets of the correspondent nature of their lives and work. Filtering, transforming, and recreating, Williams in *Paul and Virginia* proved that her work in translation remains as significant a body of work as her literary productions in English. If the *Letters from France* mediated the reception of French political thought into England, then the translated novels went further in transmitting politics and literature into a form of socio-cultural exchange. The work was conducted from the crucible of Paris at a time when so many strands of progressive thought from across Europe were woven into the contemporary discourse in the French capital. Whilst not wishing to use such a term as 'movement' to describe developmental thinking at the time, Williams can be said to have belonged to a caste of thinkers deepening the relationships between socio-political and cultural lines of communication through translation and the theorizing of translation. In order to contextualize Williams within the sphere of these developments, the next chapter addresses the evolution of the traditions of translation and theory in France, pre-unification Germany and Britain. By framing Williams within these paradigms, we can further develop the idea of Williams, not necessarily as negotiator, although she certainly negotiated some difficult mental and physical landscapes, but as mediator and trans-cultural communicator.

Chapter 3

Translation, *Traduction* and the Language of Betrayal: Eighteenth Century European

Translation, Theory and Practice

An issue of April 1848 of the Belgian edition of an obscure monthly review, the *Journal des haras, des chasses et des courses de chevaux*, *Journal of breeding, hunting and horse-racing* (Fr.) contains an anecdotal reference, attributed to Antoine Rivaroli (1753-1801), known as Rivarol, to the phrase ‘*Toute traduction est une trahison*’, ‘Every translation is a betrayal’ (Fr.).¹⁵⁶ The idea has dominated translation history and the condition of the translator as Janus-faced traducer has characterised much of the historical discourse of translation theory. Recently, critics such as Pym have dismissed simplified notions of such binary distinctions, but the concept of translator/traitor maintained currency in the period in which Williams worked. It is also useful to align such a concept with Williams in figurative terms. In her efforts to translate France and the 1789 revolution, Williams was always viewed suspiciously by authority in England. It was not only for political expression that Williams was criticized. In some quarters, she was seen as misrepresenting her sex. The book-length critique by Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits. Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, with Particular Reference to her Letters from France* (1793) was aimed squarely at Williams’s preference for political reportage to the rejection of the poetry of sensibility, the more appropriate expression for a women writer. As we have seen, Napoleon also felt Williams to be somehow traitorous, certainly subversive. Williams herself felt the betrayal of successive post-revolutionary authorities, the corruption of pre-revolutionary ideas was a constant source of chagrin to her.

¹⁵⁶ *Journal des haras, des chasses, et des courses de chevaux, d’agriculture appliquée à l’élève du cheval et des bestiaux en général* (Bruxelles: Motagne de Sion, 1848), p. 207. Now recognised mainly in France as a satirist, the comte de Rivarol, hailed by Burke as the ‘Tacitus of the French Revolution’, made his name with his 1784, *Dissertation sur l’universalité de la langue française*. The treatise affirmed the superiority of French as the mechanism for cultural exchange in enlightenment Europe, due to its inherent logic and precision. NB: In the phrase, *toute traduction est trahison*, the noun, *trahison* offers the more literal *treason*. The potentialities once again highlight the intractability of translation.

The duality of fidelity and betrayal was, therefore, well understood by Williams personally and in cultural terms. She was well versed in the contemporary thinking on translation in Europe and her creatively-liberal style reflects a certain playfulness with binary strictures. This playfulness extends, as we shall see in the chapters concerning her prefaces, where she employs the modesty topos to great effect. Williams understood the rules and was keen to bend, if not to break, them. Three main strands of theory had emerged by the time of Williams's translation career: the French, German and British traditions, with the German largely developing as a result, at least in our period, of French cultural hegemony throughout the preceding century. Williams was operating in a time of great upheaval, not only in geopolitics, but in the literary and socio-cultural movements which fed into those large political changes. France had dominated European cultural exchange, but the landscape was changing as the pre-unification German states, particularly Prussia, began to establish national literatures and identities. Williams absorbed influence from these two traditions and, of course, maintained a channel of communication with England. In order to discuss Williams in this way it is necessary to explore the development of European translation history in order to contextualise her position, a position from which we can once again stress her importance as mediator.

In his 1784 study of the French language, Rivarol asserted, '[c]e qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français', 'that which is not clear is not French' (Fr.), concisely reinscribing the pseudo-scientific attributions of clarity, purity, and assimilation which had characterised the French project of intellectual, linguistic, and political-cultural hegemony throughout the preceding century.¹⁵⁷ Going further, Rivarol claims that 'la syntaxe française est incorruptible', 'French syntax is incorruptible' (Fr.).¹⁵⁸ For *syntaxe française*, the 'logique naturelle' à tous les

¹⁵⁷ Le Comte de Rivarol, *Dissertation sur l'universalité de la langue française*, 'Essay on the Universality of the French Language' (Berlin: Decker, 1784), p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Rivarol, p. 29.

hommes', the 'natural logic of all men' (Fr.), one could superimpose *France* or *the French* here, fixing the association of the language with national identity. Finally, Rivarol argues that, 'ce qui n'est pas clair est encore anglais, italien, grec ou latin', 'that which is not clear remains English, Italian, Greek or Latin' (Fr.).¹⁵⁹ Not only do these languages remain frustratingly opaque, but the French language, and in a wider context France itself, has developed, *naturally*, into an appropriately dominant position through facilitation of contemporary European discourse. The rhetoric of linguistic, and national, superiority resonates throughout the period and is found in much national literature as nascent modern Europe takes shape. Williams herself claimed linguistic superiority as attributable to one's mother tongue. In the preface to *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, for example, she claims that, whilst we may be fluent in a foreign language, 'we love best to weep over sorrows recorded in the language in which our earliest emotions were felt.'¹⁶⁰ Williams may be employing the modesty topos here, reassuring her British readers of the primacy of their language, but it is of course important to her, in her revolutionary translation project that she indeed stirs strong emotions and these are, perhaps, most keenly felt as echoes of the psychological impressions formed in childhood. However, I suspect Williams is disingenuous here, as I would argue that her idea of selfhood does not spring from a sense of a natural nationality based on language. The citizen of the world had a far more universalist view. In her translations, rather we might argue that she works towards the idealism of a super-national language, something akin to Goethe's *Weltliteratur* or Schleiermacher's specialist translation language.

In contemporary nationalist ideology, nationality was of course considered a natural attribute of identity, if based on language, with language as the first environment in which we develop our idea of selfhood, the one in which we weep our first sorrows. The type of protectionist discourse asserted by Rivarol was not solely the realm of French writers, indeed the Prussian

¹⁵⁹ Rivarol, p. 30.

¹⁶⁰ Helen Maria Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste* (London: George Cowie and Co., 1817), p. vi.

nationalist project was characterised in part by the writings of scholars such as Schleiermacher championing the German language as destined for European hegemony. French translations had tended to adhere to the assimilative model of *Frenchification* of foreign works, most significantly since the seventeenth-century *belles-infidèles* translations began the project of reforming imported texts into style compatible with contemporary French tastes. According to Pym, ‘Schleiermacher’s political opposition to French expansionism in Germany was entirely congruent with his arguments against French annexation through translation.’¹⁶¹ Schleiermacher and others viewed the process of translation as an enrichment of national language thereby assisting in its path to dominance according to the burgeoning Prussian nationalist project. ‘Yet,’ Pym continues, ‘this is no simple pitting of the good German against the bad French. If there is nationalism here, it is progressive and dialectic rather than static or backward-looking [...] yet it is nationalism nevertheless.’¹⁶² The progressiveness of the German theories of reader alienation and bringing the reader toward the foreign is pitted against the assimilative model of French translation praxis. ‘The two methods,’ states Pym, ‘belong to two cultures separated by a thin and much challenged line. Not a balance, but a line, a border.’¹⁶³ A border at which we find Helen Maria Williams.

Whilst the unknown author in the *Journal des haras* attributes the phrase concerning the translator/traitor dichotomy as originating from the pen of Rivarol: ‘vous savez ce mot de Rivarol’, ‘You know this saying of Rivarol’ (Fr.), the phrase is more likely an attribution deriving from the pen of various critics arising from commentary upon Rivarol’s translation of Dante’s *Inferno* (1783).¹⁶⁴ Victor Del Litto, for example, records that, ‘la postérité

¹⁶¹ Pym, p. 13.

¹⁶² Pym, p. 13.

¹⁶³ Pym, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴ *Journal des haras, des chasses, et des courses de chevaux, d’agriculture appliquée à l’élève du cheval et des bestiaux en général* (Bruxelles : Motagne de Sion, 1848), p. 207.

cependant a reproché à Rivarol d'avoir sacrifié la fidélité à l'élégance du style.', 'posterity meanwhile has reproached Rivarol for having sacrificed fidelity for elegance of style' (Fr.).¹⁶⁵ 'D'autres encore appliqueront à Rivarol le mot *traduttore traditore*', 'others continued to apply the term *traduttore traditore* to Rivarol' (Fr.), states Litto, referring to a review of the *Inferno* translation in which E. Despois asserts, with a clarity Rivarol would admire, that 'cette traduction est une trahison', 'this translation is a betrayal.' (Fr.)¹⁶⁶ Ubiquitous in the discourse of translation and often reinscribed as the Italian adage, 'traduttore, traditore', 'translator, traitor', the aphorism reappears throughout the history of translation with remarkable frequency. Widely believed to have originated in Italian reactions to Renaissance French translations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the delightfully alliterative pun points to the intractable nature of the question of untranslatability and to the philosophical impossibility of the very act of translation. Both sides, it is considered, must operate conterminously. Williams works with this paradox and manages, through her negotiation of light and dark to signal a third way: mediation.

Obverse conditions of expression are of particular significance in Romantic writing. The idea is most fervently expressed in Victor Hugo's celebration of dualism in the manifesto of French Romanticism, the Preface to *Cromwell* (1827), wherein he calls for writers to observe and record the ugly as well as the beautiful, despair as well as joy. Williams prefigures Hugo's determination for bilateral writing by some years and, although Williams rarely plumbs the dark depths to such a degree as Hugo might suggest (it will be Baudelaire who ventures this far), she is always alert to the potential for the presentation of alternate views. Williams often emerges as champion of the paradox. However, she did not work in a vacuum.

¹⁶⁵ Victor Del Litto, *La vie intellectuelle de Stendhal: genèse et évolution de ses idées (1802-1821)* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1997), p. 90.

¹⁶⁶ Litto, p. 90, n. 330. NB. I translate using *betrayal* here for *trahison*, this being a more literal rendering. However, further referential potential is always attendant, lending the possibility of more sound correspondence with, 'this translation is a treachery/is treacherous', for example. This illustrates the inherent complexity of translation itself and the question of equivalence which provides translation's ever-present paradox.

Writers and translators across Europe were re-examining language, identity and culture and literature in line with the re-examination of politics and nationality providing the fuel for the socio-political explosions at hand.

‘The literature on the theory, practice, and history of translation is large.’¹⁶⁷ Steiner’s truism is a useful one. Diachronically defining a complex network of theoretical analyses leading back to antiquity, Steiner showed how translation and its attendant theoretical discourse have been perpetually significant. The subsequent archaeology of translation philosophy undertaken by scholars in recent years has produced a detailed picture of the long history of writings in and on translation. The period with which this study is concerned is one upon which there is considerable agreement: the beginnings of modern Europe following the French Revolution of 1789. As Fred Burwick has shown in recent writing on Romantic translation in the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature* (2012), attitudes to nationality, national identity and national language, particularly in France and in Germany, were being shaped at this time and translation as a creative agency of developmental transfer was immanent in this process. It is therefore appropriate to follow a historical model of translation theory in connection with the development of national languages and identities at this time and to site the Romantic period as a definitive marker in European cultural history. As much as it is practical to position Romantic translation and translation theory within a historical lineage and to situate developments in terms of a period, so it is useful to establish analysis of theoretical histories according to socio-political fields. At the end of the eighteenth century, European writers wrestled with the philosophy of translation according to national perspectives as, informed by the importation of foreign literature, cultural and political identities were shaped by manifold relationships of trans-cultural literary interchange.

¹⁶⁷ Steiner, p. 248

To contextualise Williams's oeuvre, we can use a précis of pre-revolutionary Anglo-Franco-Germanic translation-theory to situate her within a Romantic juncture of the three traditions. Williams was a contemporary of Alexander Fraser Tytler, whose 1791 rules for translation represent the seminal work on translation theory in the British tradition. The *Essay on the Principles of Translation* attempted to schematize the rules for good translation practice and was the first endeavour of such rigour produced in English concerned with the process of translation itself. The delineation of rules was not entirely a new theoretical development, however. In France, the printer and humanist, Étienne Dolet (1509-46) is often regarded as first formulating a programmatic mode of translation theory. In fact, as Douglas Robinson has shown, similar lists of prerequisites for 'good' translating had been posited a century before by the Italian humanist, Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444), and Duarte, King of Portugal (1391-1438, reigned 1433-1438). For the development of French cultural identity, however, Dolet's work was an influential expansion upon preceding tenets and his five point programme signalled the growth of France as a literary nation. As Steiner states, 'French pre-eminence in the theory of translation during this period was no accident: it reflected the political and linguistic centrality of French culture during and after the break-up of European Latinity.'¹⁶⁸ Dolet's *La manière de bien traduire d'une autre langue en autre* (*The Way to Translate Well From One Language into Another*) (1540), categorized five fundamental principles towards a systematic and repeatable method, emphasising the primacy of the source text within the matrix of the translational transaction whilst suggesting the ascendancy of the target language. Central to France's domestic and European ambitions in the sixteenth century, translation was, as Bassnett's translation of Edmond Carey suggests, 'an affair of State and a matter of Religion. The Sorbonne and the king were equally concerned with it.'¹⁶⁹ Guardianship of the national language was championed by a near-contemporary of Dolet,

¹⁶⁸ Steiner, p. 276

¹⁶⁹ Translated by Bassnett from E. Cary, *Les Grands Traducteurs Français* (Genève: Librairie de l'Université, 1963), in Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 60

Joachim du Bellay (1522?-1560), founder of La Pléiade, whose manifesto, the *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (*Defence and Illustration of the French Language*) sought to enshrine the supremacy of the French language through assimilation and imitation of classical models, according to Mary Lewis Shaw, ‘undertaking a sort of grafting that would make all this Antique wealth their own.’¹⁷⁰ As part of the Renaissance project of elevating French linguistic and cultural status, literary artefacts were to be plundered in order to produce equivalent domestic masterpieces. The revisiting of ancient art as provision for contemporary models was a practice which continued up to the revolutionary period. Perhaps David was its most famous practitioner, his painting, *Le Serment des Horaces*, *The Oath of the Horatii* (Fr.) (1784) has been seen as propaganda concerning state allegiance over feudal loyalties.

Following François de Malherbes’s rejection of the Pléiades’ stylistic prescriptions, foreign borrowings and imitations, systematisation in the arts re-emerged as the dominant force in the unification of French intellectual fields according to regulatory systems of classification.¹⁷¹ The importation of scientific and other non-literary texts prior to 1600 had already led to the dissemination of a broader corpus of foreign writing characterised by structure and categorisation. In the early part of the seventeenth century, French literature became increasingly structured, informed by a cultural shift towards more regulated modes of thought and definition. The insistence on the alexandrine as ideal metre, for example, imposed poetic structure according to domestic, and testable, regulation. Linguistic identity was further enshrined with the establishment in 1635 of the bastion in the defence of the French language, the *Académie française*, an institution afforded a quasi-religious status in the French intellectual consciousness. Jean Chapelain (1595-1674), a protégé of Malherbe and

¹⁷⁰ Mary Lewis Shaw, *The Cambridge Introduction to French Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2

¹⁷¹ Mary Lewis Shaw, ed., *The Cambridge Introduction to French Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

one of the founders of the *Académie*, in the 1619-1620 preface to his translation of the novel, *Guzmán de Alfarache* called for a far more empirical approach to French literature, rejecting the idea of the universal set of standards and principles as derived from classical models preferring definition of nationally-defined, contemporary rules. Chapelain and translator, Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721) were concerned with defining principles for translation into French modes of expression – and for the establishment of a linguistic cataloguing to be preserved in the first French dictionary – based on example cases, in a sort of scientific derivation of paradigms through experimental data gathering, theory as derived from practice.

At the same time, Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt (1606-1664), derided by Chapelain and Huet as a frivolous translator who ignored the rules, promoted the free translation of classical texts as a means of providing a more populist (though confined to a restricted literate class) and aesthetically satisfying literature in French. D’Ablancourt championed a dynamic, even libertarian approach. Despite his detractors, respect for the success of his translations, termed *les belles infidèles*, eventually earned him membership of the *Académie française* in 1637. A label which became an inclusive catch-all for many contemporary translations, these *beautiful but unfaithful* renderings were, and remain, controversial and debate continued as to whether they should be considered translations, adaptations or even travesties of classical sources. D’Ablancourt argued that so-called original works in French were no more than translations, disguised or otherwise, of prefiguring texts; making him something of a forebear to twentieth-century French thinkers such as Barthes and Derrida, for whom repetition was an inherent characteristic of all communication and the concept of an original work was suspicious, if not fallacious.

Adaptation and creative translation became standard practice towards the end of the seventeenth century as popularity increased demand. The desired improvement, or Frenchification, of source materials through creative agency was a consistent feature of more

literary translations, with fidelity being largely adhered to in works concerned with architecture, medicine, and other more empirical genres. The systematic assimilation of foreign literary texts into the French national consciousness, the discovery of which later provided Prussian nationalists literary justifications against French European domination, was undertaken by means of violent domestication. *Belles-infidèles*, French in style, content and language came to dominate at home and abroad as the exported versions from which other nations would receive the foreign through translated literature, with France as ultimate arbiter and intermediary.

Can we say, then, that Williams's translations can be classified as *belles infidèles*? Was she herself a beautiful traitor? Certainly, Williams was always keen to ignore prescriptions and to break rules. Perhaps her contributions were so liberally executed so as to be labelled as such. However, there is never really any attempt to Anglicise the 1789 revolution to such an extent that it becomes indistinguishable from reportage of any English political event. Her translation of this conception remains firmly rooted in its very foreignness, the ideas come from abroad and are therefore to be marvelled at as distinctly different. As a citizen of the world, her endeavour is to promote difference in order to propose coalescence towards its obverse, fellowship and mutuality.

The term *belles infidèles* is loaded with the misogynistic suspicions of patriarchy which characterizes so much of literary history. The French noun, *traduction*, is in fact feminine in gender, so the term *belles infidèles* contains some natural accord. However, the resonances of suspicious femininity and of the lurking possibility for treachery are legible, if not clearly audible. As a challenge to such notions, a rare female voice emerged in the contemporary discourse, that of Anne Marie Dacier (1654-1720), a scholar who had achieved great acclaim for her translations of the *Illiad* (1699) and the *Odyssey* (1708). Critical of contemporary adaptations to suit taste, Dacier sought faithfulness in translation and respect for the source

text and context. Differentiating the ‘servile’ from the ‘noble and generous’ translation, Dacier preferred the ‘noble’ art of prose translation which she felt provided a more rich field of semantic possibility than poetry, the less respectable form as fidelity necessitated word-for-word exchange, which in poetry precluded the transfer of sense and necessitated abridgement.¹⁷² Prose translation allowed for creativity and independence in the search for appropriate or approximate equivalences. This approach speaks to Chateaubriand’s prose translation of Milton, which in his preface he describes as heralding a revolution in translation, more of which is discussed in a later chapter, here.¹⁷³ Committed to the idea of original classical genius, Dacier was highly successful and has been credited with the reintroduction of Homer into French literature at this time. Dacier’s voice, however, remains remarkable as a rare example of women’s writing as a challenge to dominant male authority. Much work remains to be done in forming the canon of women translation theorists.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the phenomenon of *Anglomanie*, *Anglomania* (Fr.), fuelled largely by Voltaire’s works of admiration for England, saw adaptations of English literature flourish. French versions of Shakespeare were legion following Voltaire’s discovery of his works in 1734 and adaptation and imitation were features of the French relationship to Shakespeare throughout the eighteenth century. The ‘improvement’ to suit French taste was first undertaken by P. A. de la Place, who constructed prose versions put on in his *Théâtre anglais* between 1745-9. Pierre Le Tournier (1737-88) translated the complete works between 1776 and 1782. Perhaps the most controversial translator of Shakespeare was Jean-François Ducis (1733-1861). Thought to have known little English, Ducis used both the versions by de la Place and le Tournier to produce his idiosyncratic prose versions, altering

¹⁷² Robinson, p. 187.

¹⁷³ See Chateaubriand, *Le Paradis Perdu de Milton. Traduction nouvelle*. 2 vols (Paris: Gosselin, 1836) (Google Advanced Books) https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-nhMAAAAcAAJandprintsec=frontcoverandsource=gbg_summary_randcad=0#v=onepageandqandf=false [Accessed 21/12/15]. The

endings, changing the ending of *Othello*, for example. As Coward states, ‘Le Tourneur naturalised his style and Ducis squeezed him into suitable French dress.’¹⁷⁴ Williams champions the ‘venerable patriot and poet’, Ducis, in the note on French literature in the preface to *Poems* (1823).¹⁷⁵ According to Kennedy, Ducis had called Williams a ‘person of infinite grace, spirit and talent when they met in 1805.’¹⁷⁶ For Williams, Ducis, ‘the translator of Hamlet and Macbeth [...], braved far longer than Delille the power of Buonaparte; refused all his gifts, and honours, the red ribbon, and the place of senator, and acquired the title of the last of the Romans.’¹⁷⁷ The title is one conferred by Williams, earlier in the *Narrative of Events* (1816) in which she had called Ducis the ‘present father of French poetry’ and referred to him as the ‘last of the Romans.’¹⁷⁸ Ducis finally accepted the *legion d’honneur* from Louis XVIII who, according to Williams, ‘addressed the poet in a citation from his own works.’¹⁷⁹ Just like Williams, Ducis had ‘approved of Bonaparte while he thought him the friend of his country, but refused all further communion with him when he became its oppressor.’¹⁸⁰ As we have seen, Napoleon’s chagrin at Williams’s ode was further incensed, according to her in 1816, by ‘the epithet of “*subject waves*,” applied to England’ which, she jokes, was declaring herself ‘of the faction of sea despots. It was almost treason.’¹⁸¹ Williams always understood the power of language and literature. Writing and translation were often dangerous callings.

Throughout the century, *Anglomania* continued apace in France with the works of Milton, Pope, Fielding and Swift being made domestically popular. Translations from English

¹⁷⁴ David Coward, *A History of French Literature, from Chanson de Geste to Cinema* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 161.

¹⁷⁵ Williams, *Poems* 1823, p. xxiv.

¹⁷⁶ Kennedy, p. 184.

¹⁷⁷ Williams, *Poems* 1823, pp. xiv-xv.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, *A Narrative of The Events which have Taken Place in France, With an Account of The Present State of Society and Public Opinion* (London: John Murray, 1816), pp. 289-90.

¹⁷⁹ Williams, *A Narrative of The Events which have Taken Place in France*, p. 290.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, *A Narrative of The Events which have Taken Place in France*, p. 290.

¹⁸¹ Williams, *A Narrative of The Events which have Taken Place in France*, p. 288.

outnumbered those from any other language. Voltaire imitated Swift and Pope and after 1760, records David Coward, ‘the “poètes du tombeau” – Young, Thompson, Gray and Ossian,’ giving poetry ‘fresh themes and a new more introspective voice.’¹⁸² Richardson, Sterne, Walpole and Godwin were popular in translation and many French novelists, according to Coward, ‘puffed their work by claiming it was “traduit de l’anglais”, though genuine translators adapted their originals to suit superior French taste.’¹⁸³

Grieder sites the end of *Anglomania* at the 1789 revolution and British literary influence certainly diminished in the Revolution’s direct aftermath. In the early part of the following century, French Romantics reengaged with British literature. Shakespeare was rediscovered and contemporary British writers such as Byron and Scott, gained in reputation. The reassertion of literalism and a tendency towards universalism in French thought at this time, however, owes more, to the influence of contemporary German philosophy. The conduit for much of this Franco-German intercourse, Germaine De Staël (1766-1817) is of particular significance in this process of intellectual transportation. According to Burwick, ‘few proponents of translations as cultural exchange were more influential than Germaine de Staël.’¹⁸⁴ Her *De l’esprit des traductions (On the Spirit of Translations)* (1816), begins with a declamation of her feelings for a universalist modernity:

There is no more distinguished service that can be performed for literature than to transport the masterpieces of human intellect from one language to another. There are few works of the first rate; genius in any genre whatsoever is so rare a phenomenon that is any modern nation were reduced to its own such treasures, it would be forever poor. Moreover, of all the forms of commerce the circulation of ideas is the one whose benefits are most certain.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Coward, p. 161.

¹⁸³ Coward, p. 161.

¹⁸⁴ Frederick Burwick, ‘Translation’, in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed by Frederick Burwick, 3. Vols (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), Vol. III, p. 1435.

¹⁸⁵ Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, baronne de Staël-Holstein, *De l’esprit des traductions, On the Spirit of Translation*, trans. by David, G. Ross, in Robinson, p. 241

Williams and Staël shared many friends and were both considered dangerous by Napoleon, who ordered the burning of the first edition of Staël's *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)* in 1810, fearing the reception of any of Staël's anti-French or pro-German rhetoric.¹⁸⁶ Despite Napoleon's effort, the book became, according to Robert Gildea, 'the single most influential account of Germany for the French reader in the first half of the nineteenth century.'¹⁸⁷ Staël's *De l'esprit des traductions* demonstrates her affiliation with German Romantic translation theory in its advocacy of the positive transformative agency of translation on national culture. Her vision of the transfer of ideas towards trans-national intellectual development stands in stark contrast to traditionally defensive and assimilative French views of national culture and aligns her with the progressive and universalist mentality of Williams. Maintaining concern with domestic enrichment, Staël suggests the commonality of understanding of ideas for which translation acts as the mechanism for the provision of access between linguistic barriers. Rallying against the restrictive protectionism and forced naturalisation in French translations, Staël instead expresses German views of the expansive possibilities of more mutually beneficial negotiations. 'One must aim at the universal when one wishes to do men good,'¹⁸⁸ she asserts. Williams would no doubt agree. Burwick argues that Staël felt that translation must 'strive to fulfil a more important function [than the production of populist domestic artefacts] of mediating among different cultures.'¹⁸⁹ In this view, both languages and both cultures are enriched by the negotiation inherent in the creative processes on either side of the exchange.¹⁹⁰ Staël's theory of translation was directly informed by her familiarity with, and adoption of, the tenets of contemporary German philosophy, not least through her friendship with the Schlegels, Friedrich and, particularly

¹⁸⁶ Williams, who knew Staël, had secured similar imperial displeasure for her omission of Bonaparte from her celebratory *Ode on the Peace* of 1801.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Gildea, *Children of the Revolution: The French, 1799-1914* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 203

¹⁸⁸ Staël, in Robinson, ed., p. 242

¹⁸⁹ Burwick, p. 1435.

¹⁹⁰ Burwick, p. 1435.

August Wilhelm and by her extensive reading of Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the most oft-quoted contributors in translation theory history. Interpreting and disseminating German thought at a critical juncture, Staël writes at the moment at which, arguably, German translation theory reached its intellectual zenith, at the threshold of Steiner's first and second translation epochs, whereupon the figures of Williams, Tytler and Schleiermacher enter the discourse.

The beginnings of a theoretical programme for translation towards the rationalisation of the German language are marked in 1697 with Leibniz's publication of the *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache* (*Impartial Thoughts Concerning the Use and Improvement of the German Language*), a document which, according to Robinson, calls for a 'nationalistic linguistics that consolidates Renaissance theories of linguistic richness, purity and brilliance and looks ahead to German Romantics like Wilhelm von Humboldt.'¹⁹¹ Comparing the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* or 'Productive Society', a Weimar literary society founded in 1617 for the purification of German, with the Italian *Accademia della Crusca* and the *Académie française*, Leibniz argues strongly for improvement in the vernacular, where 'the richness, purity, and brilliance of the German language should appear, three essential qualities of any language.'¹⁹² Supporting faithfulness in translation (translation being the 'true test of a language's superfluity or deficiency') the tract admits the failings of German to cater for strict word-for-word translation.¹⁹³ Leibniz suggests the formation of a committee for 'reviewing and inspecting good German writings', to conduct research in obsolete German words and to coin

¹⁹¹ Douglas Robinson, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (Manchester, St. Jerome, 2012), p. 184.

¹⁹² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 'Enriching the German Language', from *Impartial Thoughts Concerning the Use and Improvement of the German Language* (*Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache*, 1697), trans. Douglas Robinson, in Robinson, p. 184.

¹⁹³ Leibniz, in Robinson, p. 185.

neologisms where necessary and to explore alterity for the purposes of enrichment, declaring that, 'Rome became great by absorbing the foreign.'¹⁹⁴

The absorption of the foreign provides the potential for assimilative translation, a practice criticized for its denial of the foreign. As has been often said, to translate is to serve two masters and, as Berman has argued, in order to serve the foreign work and language and 'one's own public and one's own language,' a 'double fidelity is needed, [...] incessantly threatened by the spectre of a double treason.'¹⁹⁵ Near-contemporaries of Leibniz, Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766) and Swiss translators Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701-76) diverged over Bodmer's 1732 translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and, subsequently, whether it be permissible for the translator to imitate style and form at the expense of normative practices in the target language. Gottsched's view was that it was necessary to abridge, expand or improve a text should the norms of German poetics require it. In Kittel and Poltermann's words, 'the translation had to be a German text, through and through.'¹⁹⁶ On the other side, as a precursory pointer to the later works of Herder and Humboldt, Breitinger argued that language reflects the psychological complexities of its speakers' nation. Translation must not perform the violence inherent in any act of purging or incursion. Deviation from the original was, for the Swiss theorists, oppression of the spirit of the work and, by extension, a dismissal of the cultural peculiarities of the originating language and society.

French cultural hegemony in Europe meant that French was the only mediating agency in the transfer between other European languages and German. German translators often used intermediary French translations of English texts, even when source-language editions were available. Dissatisfaction with French dominance and disillusionment with French

¹⁹⁴ Leibniz, in Robinson, p. 186.

¹⁹⁵ Berman, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 422.

translations of British works led to a virtual rejection of French translational models. Kittel and Poltermann argue this transition is ‘ultimately symptomatic of a paradigmatic change in the German history of thought: the emancipation from French intellectual and cultural hegemony, accompanied by the demise of rationalism, and the eventual propagation of an autonomous German national literature.’¹⁹⁷

Occupying a similarly deified position in the German canon to that of Shakespeare in English literature, Goethe also performed an analysis of translation. As Frederick Burwick records, Goethe wrote that ““in translating, one must confront the untranslatable; only then will one become aware of a foreign nation and a foreign language.””¹⁹⁸ For Goethe, translation is integrated into his concept of *Weltliteratur* (world literature). Despite its insistence on universality, however, Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* is not an amalgam, a totality of all the literatures of the world, as Berman puts it, ‘past and present [...] accessible to the encyclopedic gaze.’¹⁹⁹ Rather, it is, according to Berman, ‘an historical concept concerning the *modern* situation of the relation among diverse national or regional literatures’ and is conditional on continuous interaction.²⁰⁰ Suggesting three types, or epochs, of translation, Goethe’s was less a theory than the programmatic practice which ‘found its executors in A. W. Schlegel and L. Tieck and its theorists in F. Schlegel and Novalis.’²⁰¹ Goethe’s ‘prosaic translation’, as its name suggests is most suited for prose translation and was useful in allowing familiarization with the foreign ‘in our own terms’, Luther’s Bible being Goethe’s era-defining benchmark.²⁰² The second epoch, the ‘parodistic’, is clearly less favourable as Goethe once again invokes French style as the model of inappropriate translation in this manner: ‘The French, who invariably insist on making foreign words feel right in their

¹⁹⁷ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 422.

¹⁹⁸ Burwick, p. 1437.

¹⁹⁹ Berman, p. 55.

²⁰⁰ Berman, p. 55.

²⁰¹ Berman, p. 14.

²⁰² Berman, p. 14.

tongues, do the same to feelings, thoughts, even things: they demand for every foreign fruit surrogate grown in their own soil.’²⁰³ Even when done well this epoch is more often one of emulation than translation in the sense of *Treue* according to German. The third epoch which allows for a further level of categorisation within the translation process is one which sees an identical translation. That is to say, one which embodies the ideas, spirit, meanings of the original but crucially in the creation of a third ‘original’ resulting from negotiation between the two existing texts, both source and target with the concentration on adherence to the source text ‘original’. This, Goethe admits, is radical, and is an approach which ‘met with the strongest resistance’, as the “‘third’” was something or which the ‘masses are not ready.’²⁰⁴ However, as proved by Voss and Von Hammer in translation of the Classics and Oriental poetry, both of which adhered sufficiently to original genius for Goethe, this epoch is possible, indeed most desirable. In idealistic and visionary rhetoric, reminiscent of Novalis, Goethe states that ‘a translation that seeks to be identified with the original approximates finally the interlinear version; in its attempt to enhance our understanding of the original it leads us onward, drives us on toward the source text, and so finally closes the circle in which the alien and the familiar, the known and the unknown move toward each other.’²⁰⁵ This kind of thinking is crucial to Williams’s practice. It is clear that the stream of thought proposed by Goethe and examined by Schlegel was a current in which Williams was moving. In her attempts to translate aspects of revolutionary ethics and culture, she was always trying to lead her readership towards the source text, the revolution itself and thereby closing the circle of communication with shared humanity towards liberty. According to Berman, ‘it can be said that, to a certain extent, [German] Romantic translation seeks to play with languages and their literatures, to make them “fall into” one another at all levels.’²⁰⁶ The playful aspect in

²⁰³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘Translations’, from *West-Öslicher Divan* (1819), in Robinson, p. 223.

²⁰⁴ Goethe, in Robinson, p. 223.

²⁰⁵ Goethe, in Robinson, p. 224.

²⁰⁶ Berman, p. 15.

Williams's translation is clear, particularly in the prefaces, where irony and a type of tongue-in-cheek modesty pervade. Her play and experimentation follow a Romantic attitude in this sense. F. Schlegel, places '*criticism, understanding, and translation* within the same essential proximity, though in a psychological way.'²⁰⁷ Williams, maintained the same psychological amalgam, making her a Romantic translator in the same vein.

In the 1798 collection of fragments, *Blütenstaub* ('Pollen'), Novalis, as both Burwick and Robinson have suggested prefigures Goethe's tripartite theory of translation and his works, though scant, reveal the will to a model of inter-lingual and, perhaps, intercultural transaction towards a Romantic ideal of transformation and integration.²⁰⁸ In working towards establishing scientific associations with his 'art' of translating, Novalis posits a shift in definition of guiding principles which had been consistently suggested as rules and guidelines since Dolet, suggesting a visionary approach to works of translation, in fact to the process itself, which does not yet exist. Of the three types of translation, grammatical, transformative, and mythic, it is mythic translations which are translations in the 'noblest style', as they are held to contain the purest form and perfect character of the individual work of art. This represents a significant breakthrough in theoretical thinking as, according to Burwick, 'rather than thinking of the original as a linguistic construct, [Novalis] suggests that it belongs to a cultural system of belief, trust or faith. The translator must share that cultural credence and reflect it through the artistry of the translated language.'²⁰⁹ A movement towards a future understanding through contemporary interaction with the past is fundamental to Williams's revolutionary translation. In her prefaces she continuously signals to the judgement of futurity, marking herself as the recorder of the moment. These constant references to posterity will be discussed further in the chapter concerned. These translations with which

²⁰⁷ Berman, p. 14

²⁰⁸ See Burwick, 'Translation', and Robinson, 'Novalis'.

²⁰⁹ Burwick, p. 1437.

Novalis is concerned have yet to be undertaken and it is true that he gives little in the way of instruction on how the work is to be done, but he does emphasise, once again, the importance of the translator as the ‘poet’s poet’, capable of creation and expression of the dual voices and ideas. Very much the Romantic, Williams is a creative force in all her work. Again, Novalis stresses the necessity for a commonality of understanding between races and nations: ‘the genius of all humankind stands in very much the same relationship to every individual human’ and suggests further that translation and therefore enhanced and mutually-beneficial communication is indeed possible, for ‘books’ he suggests, ‘are not the only things that can be translated by these three methods, anything can.’²¹⁰ Political revolutions or cultural milieus, for example. In the development of ideas in the German Romantics we see the most visionary and fully realised view of the process and purpose of translation. The philosophical movement towards the enhancement of translation for the purposes of universal enhancement, in terms of national literature and also towards cultural transfer and commonality, is most fervent in Germany and travels to Williams, who is engaged in a similar Romantic journey.

Equally convinced of originating genius and of the power of translation, August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845) had revised a translation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1795. He began work on a full translation of Shakespeare in 1797 and by 1810 he had completed 17 plays. Long-term companion of Madame de Staël, Schlegel accompanied her on her travels through Europe in 1804, engaged as her sons’ tutor and contributing a great deal to the work on *De l’Allemagne*. The influence of Schlegel’s thought, itself informed by Herder and Goethe, is discernible in Staël’s promotion of an inclusive, liberal approach to interaction, communication and the incorporation of the foreign, towards the Romantic vision of an interactive World-literature. In his early essay on the translation of Dante in 1791, *Dante* –

²¹⁰ Novalis, ‘Grammatical, Transformative, and Mythic Translations.’, from *Blütenstaub* (‘Pollen’), in Robinson, p.213.

Über die Göttliche Komödie ('Dante – On the Divine Comedy'), Schlegel attests to the importance of attention to the author's character, attributing the qualities of 'noble rust' (*aeruga nobilis*), a sign of great value, used by numismatists in authenticating old coins, to the artistic marks left upon a work by its original author. In characteristically, anti-French style, Schlegel asserts that, 'only an erstwhile Frenchman would coldly polish off that rust while describing or translating the work, just so he could smugly show off his shiny penny.'²¹¹

The 1796 *Etwas über Wilhelm Shakespeare bei Gelegen-heit Wilhelm Meisters* (*Something on Shakespeare In Connection with Wilhelm Meister*') reveals Schlegel's feeling for both the internationalism and the essential Germanness of Shakespeare, the relationship between the author, his life and milieu, and the work of originating genius:

No, he is not foreign to us. We need not take a single step out of character in order to feel that he is 'wholly ours'. The sun can be blocked by fog, genius by prejudice; but until every last vestige of feeling for simplicity and truth is utterly extinguished among us, we will always return to him with love. [...] he wrote as he lived. In everything that poured forth from his soul there lives and speaks an ancient simplicity, a deeply human authenticity, an unpretentious greatness, an innocence sacred and sure, a mildness godlike and true.²¹²

The foreign work and the foreign author are capable, through translation, of direct and significant penetration into the national consciousness. Schlegel advocates this ideal through the embracing of the other, the foreign and the unknown. True and poetic translation necessitates risk. One must examine and understand difference in order to achieve *Treue*, fidelity. Literalism will not do. 'Fidelity,' says Schlegel, 'entails making the same or similar

²¹¹ August Wilhelm von Schlegel, 'Noble Rust', from 'Dante: On the *Divine Comedy*' (*Dante – Über die Göttliche Komödie*, 1791), trans. by Douglas Robinson, in Robinson, p. 214.

²¹² Schlegel, 'At Once Faithful and Poetic', from *Something on Shakespeare In Connection with Wilhelm Meister* (*Etwas über Wilhelm Shakespeare bei Gelegen-heit Wilhelm Meisters*, 1796), in Robinson, pp. 215-6.

impression, for impressions are the essence of the thing.’²¹³ The emphasis is on the emotional communication available in the original work and that which should be felt by and expressed by the translator towards a revelatory celebration of non-normative literature.

In order to do this, non-violent means of acquisition are advocated. Writing one year later in 1803, Schlegel affirms that ‘today we make peaceful raids into foreign countries, especially the south of Europe, and return laden with our poetic spoils.’²¹⁴ Schlegel’s vision, shared by Staël and Williams, is a mutually-beneficial community of exchange. Cultures, languages, and peoples are to be enriched by the interaction through translation. However, there is, as with Staël, a view of the hierarchical position of the national language and indeed the national character, something which inevitably characterises the philosophy of the writer. Again from the *History of Classical Literature*, Schlegel explains the principles which would enable the facility of translating from any language:

Not that I mean for this to be viewed as a structural advantage of German alone; with a little determination and enthusiasm for the task at hand any other culture could become equally receptive to expanded variety. It’s just that it is particularly strong in our language, due to the greater pains it has taken to emulate inwardly the agitations and vibrations of the soul that correspond to all external sequences: the willingness of the German national character to project itself into foreign mentalities, indeed to surrender utterly to them, is so integral to our language as to make it the deftest translator and mediator for everyone else.²¹⁵

The very idea of translating, as defined in terms of good and bad practice would seem to reaffirm notions of stricture and regulation, if expressed in more vague terminology.

However, the point remains that Schlegel’s vision of art, as informed by the practice of translation itself, formed the basis of the period’s most significant shifts in aesthetic philosophy. Schlegel saw the work of art as a unified, constructed organism, an *organische*

²¹³ Schlegel, ‘Projecting Oneself into Foreign Mentalities’, from *History of Classical Literature (Geschichte der klassischen Literatur*, 1802), in Robinson, p. 219.

²¹⁴ Schlegel, ‘The Speaking Voice of the Civilized Worlds’, from *History of Romantic Literature (Geschichte der romantischen Literatur*, 1803), in Robinson, p. 220.

²¹⁵ Schlegel, *History of Classical Literature*, in Robinson, p. 220.

Kunstform, or ‘organic created form’ resulting from authorial, intentional, creative agency. In this view, every aspect of a work relates to every other and is a vital constituent of the work as a whole. It therefore follows that, in translation every detail must be studied and understood in order that the reader be granted access to the work as it exists. However, the readership would have the impression that they are reading an original German work and not a translation. This necessitates adherence to both the objective fidelity to the source text and the subjective aspects of creativity and transformation towards naturalisation in the target language and culture. Fidelity to the original artwork seems to suggest a refusal of creativity whilst transformation and naturalisation offer a conclusion of denial of the original entity. The Romantic paradox which makes itself obvious here is the one at which Williams was most at home with. Considering the impositions of self in her text as creatively driven expressions alongside the adherence to source material and, in particular, the original ideals proposed in post-revolutionary Paris, Williams emerges as a translator always at work within the circles of this intractable paradox. Having secured her reputation in England as a poet, it is no surprise that Williams should exercise such licence in her translations, but this once again throws up the thorny question of fidelity *versus* liberality.

In a letter to Schlegel, from the 30th November 1797, Novalis, for whom ‘no German writer of any substance [...] has not also been a translator’, reveals the veneration for the transformative art of translation, whilst reinscribing the nascent nationalism, later more fully expounded by Schleiermacher:²¹⁶

In Germany translation could become both a science and an art [...]. We are the only nation (barring the Romans) who feel so irresistibly driven to translate and who have learned so immensely from it. [...] This drive is a sign of the German people’s primordial nobility – a sign of that blend of the cosmopolitan and the forcefully individual that is true Germanness. Only for us have translations been expansions. One submits to true translation of a kind of poetic morality, out of the sacrifice of

²¹⁶ Novalis, *Translating Out of Poetic Morality* (1797), ‘From a Letter to A. W. Schlegel’, trans. by Douglas Robinson, in Robinson, p. 212.

one's desires – out of a genuine love of beauty and the literature of the fatherland. To translate is to write poetry, every bit as creative an undertaking as writing one's own works – and harder, and rarer.²¹⁷

In the end, all poetry is translation. For Berman, it is obvious that, 'in their reflection on the connection of translation and poetry, Novalis and Schlegel have something more specific in mind than the affirmation that all thought and discourse are "translations." While they do adhere to this traditional point of view, they envisage a more essential connection between poetry and translation.'²¹⁸ The enthusiasm and excitement at the possibilities of a new understanding of the 'art' of translation are palpable and, had Novalis lived past his late twenties, it would be fascinating to discover where his burgeoning theoretical philosophy may have led. The championing of German intellectual history, peppered with the jingoistic language of the 'primordial nobility' of those contributors to the literary heritage of the 'fatherland', leads ultimately to the definition of translation as a truly Romantic art. As Chesterman argues, 'by bringing new forms and ideas into the target culture, translators do indeed help to shape [culture]; they are instrumental in the creation and development of a national culture.'²¹⁹ It is this role, for Chesterman, that suggests an 'appropriate metaphor for this stage in translation theory development: translating is creating. A translator is an artist who shapes language.'²²⁰ Translation, a culturally vital and, for Novalis, almost biologically determined necessity, incorporates sacrifice, poetry, and a heightened aesthetic sensibility. As a creative agency of poetic expression, both individually and nationalistically, translation is to be raised, through hard and rare work, to a position of literary and philosophical importance far above a conception of easy-won transcription. Revelation is to be achieved, and studied as an art and as a science, through creative interaction with the foreign, not only with the text,

²¹⁷ Novalis, in Robinson, p. 212-3.

²¹⁸ Berman, p. 14.

²¹⁹ Chesterman, p. 27.

²²⁰ Chesterman, p. 27.

but with the shared aspects of nations and peoples and with the individual creative processes of the translator, in many ways the originating genius, of the negotiated text. Williams's translation of *Paul and Virginia* provides us with the supporting evidence for this view as the work was, indeed, transformed by Williams and became extremely popular in England, with Williams seen as its quasi-original author. The effect on Wordsworth, in particular, has been argued here and elsewhere, in the creation of *The Ruined Cottage*.

The transformation of *Paul and Virginia* was not simply an exercise in textual paraphrase. At its heart was the transmission of foreign ideas as Kirkley has shown in her analysis of the text as a translation of Rousseau, or of Rousseauism. Williams was keen to bring her reader towards a strange alterity guided by her gentle mediation. A translational strategy of movement towards the foreign was the great idea of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), often cited as the most important contributor to the development of German, and broader, late-eighteenth-century translation discourse. In her *Translation Studies*, Bassnett places Schleiermacher under the heading 'Post-Romanticism', suggesting perhaps Cezanne's purification of colour and simplification of form in a nuanced development from, rather than an immediate rejection of, impressionism. This is to acknowledge the potential for any artist to resist temporal or categorical labelling, but is rather an acknowledgement, as for Williams, of the liminality of literary-historical figures. Bassnett's categorization stems, perhaps, from the dependence on pre-defined work by contemporaries. Kittel and Poltermann state, for example, that the, 'Romantic concept of translation, manifest in Schlegel's theory and practice [...] was systematically analysed by Friedrich Schleiermacher.'²²¹

Berman places Schleiermacher within his German Romantic frame, acknowledging that 'reflections by Schleiermacher and Humboldt represent the moment when translation enters

²²¹ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 423.

into the horizon of hermeneutics and the science of language’²²² and, for Robinson, ‘his importance to the romantic theory of translation cannot be overestimated.’²²³ In terms of the discourse of dynamic dualities, Schleiermacher resides within a sphere of Romantic period thinkers, a trans-European discourse which includes Williams as one of the proponents of practices following new models. Following Schlegel, Schleiermacher’s analysis in his *magnum opus*, the 1813 *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (*On the Different Methods of Translating*), lays out the theoretical basis for the romantic translation programme insisting, as for Goethe in his future-vision of *Weltliteratur*, that the reader in translation must be brought closer to the foreign through translations which engage with and harmonise with the originating language and culture creating a new literary space produced from this fusion.

Kittel and Poltermann stress the importance of Schleiermacher’s work, stating that ‘practically every modern translation theory – at least in the German-language area responds, in one way or another, to Schleiermacher’s hypotheses. There appear to have been no fundamentally new approaches.’²²⁴ Despite such claims, Schleiermacher does have his critics. As we have seen, Anthony Pym finds the binarism of Schleiermacher’s approach problematic and David Bellos, arch-critic of Schleiermacher’s hier Walter Benjamin has been critical of the lack of clarity in his arguments concerning translatorial movement and natural language(s). Schleiermacher suggested a distinct language of translation, an idea which necessitating language change domestically and, one imagines, the collection and collation of translational linguistic data on a huge scale. The details of such an idea are indistinct, the source of much criticism. However, what signals itself here is the idea of a universalism of language, the innate possibility of communication in some liminal field of human communication, at once over and through the disparate cultural-linguistic structures. As a

²²² Berman, p. 17.

²²³ Robinson, p. 225.

²²⁴ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p 424.

believer in the universalism of literature and liberty, Williams had this understanding and shared Schleiermacher's belief in what Kittel and Poltermann term the 'innovative [and] the regenerative powers of translation.'²²⁵

Schleiermacher distinguishes between two not entirely distinct categories of translation: the occasionally overlapping boundaries of *interpretation* and *translation proper*. 'The *interpreter*', or *dolmetscher*, Schleiermacher declares, 'works in the world of commerce, while the *translator proper* [*übersetzer*] works in the fields of scholarship and art.'²²⁶ The process of translation in the world of business centres on the interpretation of 'visible, or at least precisely defined objects' and translation is therefore 'merely a mechanical task', whereas in the 'transplantation of artistic and scholarly works' the multi-layered and dense complexities of correspondence become obvious. The second category is problematic as source texts of this type are bound within cultural and hermeneutic frames which seemingly preclude any facility for translation and the conventions which tie linguistic constructs to historical meaning render these texts effectively untranslatable. Differences, those expressions through language of nebulous, but culturally understood conventions, relating to concepts, emotions, and other abstract phenomena, are compounded by the difficulty, not only of linguistic difference, but by the complexity of association of concepts which differ from culture to culture. This is not restricted to national difference. Schleiermacher states that:

We find this same phenomenon within the confines of a single language as well. For not only are the different regional dialects of a people and the different developmental stages of a language or dialect over the centuries in a strict sense different languages, requiring translation between them, even contemporaries who speak the same dialect but come from different social classes and cultural backgrounds, especially when they do not come into social contact with each other, require a similar mediation in order to communicate. And do we not frequently feel compelled to translate the speech of

²²⁵ Kittel and Poltermann, in Baker, ed., p. 424.

²²⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Different Methods of Translating* (*Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens*, 1813), in Robinson, p. 226.

people who are quite like us but of a different cast of mind? [...] Sometimes we even have to translate our own words, when they feel alien and we want to make them truly our own again.²²⁷

In short, translation is ubiquitous, we are always translating. In order to retain meaning and associative significances from originating discourse, it therefore follows that the translator is bound, in a process of true translation, to the culture from, and associative conventions of, the source text. This necessitates the notion of ‘alienation’, or of alienating translation, whereby the target language is remoulded to accommodate originating conventions. This also then requires a particular language for translation. This is something of a visionary leap forward and that which has found most critical ambivalence, as it necessarily involves language change on a large scale and potentially with each instance of translation, at least with that of poetry or philosophical texts. Schleiermacher’s view, in this sense, was that, far from translation serving simply as a means of transposing a distinct, unique linguistic construct from one culture to another, translation could serve as a regenerative force, one with the power to shape a communal language towards cultural multiversity. It must be said, however, that Schleiermacher, as with his contemporaries, prizes the German language and the German proclivity towards translation most highly and the theory is part of the strengthening project of anti-French, Prussian nationalism. Schleiermacher declares that:

It seems that our respect for the foreign and our mediatory nature together destine the German people to incorporate linguistically, and to preserve in the geographical centre and heart of Europe, all the treasures of both foreign and our own art and scholarship in a prodigious historic totality, so that with the help of our language anyone can enjoy, as purely and perfectly as a foreigner can, all the beauty that the ages have wrought.²²⁸

The German people, through sacrifice and openness to change and acceptance of the foreign are to become the guardians of the world’s artistic heritage. The future-vision of an

²²⁷ Schleiermacher, in Robinson, p. 226.

²²⁸ Schleiermacher, in Robinson, p. 238.

incorporative world-language must find its basis in German, one suspects. However, the universality of Schleiermacher's vision of an eventual state of harmonised linguistic exchange is supported by Venuti, who argues that, with translation as the 'locus of cultural difference, not the homogeneity that his imperialist nationalism might imply, he was effectively recommending a translation practice that would undermine any language-based concept of a national culture.'²²⁹ Williams never expresses a theoretical paradigm with such clarity anywhere in her translations, but the idea that translation is the means of subversion of existing ideology and of communality through the engagement with alterity was a defining trope of her practice.

Intercultural communication necessitates translation. The process requires mediation of the omnipresent paradox of untranslatability and the inherent loss of the original authorial voice. Dismissing paraphrase and imitation (paraphrase incapable of coping with what Schleiermacher terms the 'irrationality of language' with imitation rendering the translation merely a commentary) Schleiermacher argues for the movement of bringing the reader closer to the author, claiming that, 'the source-language author and the target-language reader must either meet at a middle point, which is always that of the translator, or the one must cross over to the camp of the other.'²³⁰ In the intertextualities between Bernardin, Williams and Wordsworth in *Paul and Virginia* and between Maistre, Williams and Wordsworth in *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, between Williams, France, Germany and England, Williams is the common centre, the middle point at which influences converge and are regenerated. As representative of this middle point, unsatisfactory perhaps for Schleiermacher, Williams was integral as liminal mediator between European Romanticisms. She refutes, therefore, the binarisms so disliked by Pym and becomes the embodiment of the third way as she brings the reader closer to the foreign whilst incorporating domestic ideas and at the same time diffusing

²²⁹ Lawrence Venuti, 'Strategies of Translation', in Baker, ed., p. 242.

²³⁰ Schleiermacher, in Robinson, p. 229.

other streams of thought throughout the works, also reminding us of the possibility of universality through difference and the potential for the reinterpretations of posterity.

As a British, later French, woman, living and working in France, and as the acquaintance of German writers, Williams dominated the middle-ground, coming to her work through a complicated nexus of theoretical tradition, French, German and Anglophone. In terms of her aptitude for multi-disciplinary expression she was also an expert mediator. Having made her reputation in England as a poet, Williams's creativity in translation is the natural correlative of the aesthetic mind. The brother of Williams's friend and colleague Alexander, Wilhelm von Humboldt's Introduction to his translation of *Agamemnon* represents a Romantic sensibility in its emphasis on instantaneous, creative genius. Translation as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, perhaps:

As one thinks oneself into the mind of the poet, into his time, into the characters he puts on the stage, the obscurity gradually fades and is replaced by an intense clarity. A part of this careful attention must also be given to the translation: never expect what is sublime, immense, and extraordinary in the original language will be easily and immediately comprehensible in the translation. Ease and clarity always remain virtues that a translator attains only with the utmost difficulty, and never through mere hard work and revision: they are due for the most part to fortuitous inspiration.²³¹

Translation as a creative process is here considered as having equal status as other literary activities viewed historically with greater respect, the art of poetry residing in the highest echelon. Fittingly, in England, the most important writings on translation came from the pens of poets. Roger Ellis and Liz Oakley-Brown's statement that, 'the tradition of translation in Britain is long and varied', echoes Steiner's truism as to the vastness of translation's temporal scope and their approach applies the same diachronic paradigm to British literary history,

²³¹ Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'From his Introduction to His Translation of *Agamemnon*', from *Aeschylus Agamemnon metrisch übersetzt* (1816), trans. by Sharon Sloane, in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 54-9, p. 59.

pointing to the importance of the relationship of translation to the history of Britain itself.²³²

Britain's early history was characterised by invasion, colonization and cultural exchange.

Imported lexicons and linguistic conventions, many of which inform modern English, necessitated consistent requirement for translation among diverse peoples and rapidly changing systems of governance. Given such a breadth of scope, it is most appropriate here to assume a time-frame beginning with developments in modern English in the period approaching the Romantic era. Jeremy Munday has suggested, invoking earlier critic F. R. Amos, the seventeenth century marked a significant 'step forward' in English approaches to translation and ideas of a theory of translation in the writings of Denham and Dryden.²³³

Sir John Denham, writing in 1650, is given as a marker for Steiner's analysis of English translation theory ending with Cowper in 1800. According to Bassnett, in the preface to his translation of *The Destruction of Troy* (1656) Denham argued for 'a concept of translation that sees translator and original writer as equals but operating in clearly differentiated social and temporal contexts.'²³⁴ The enhanced status was due to the translator, particularly the translator of poetry, whose art was a creative process, translating not '[l]anguage into [l]anguage, but [p]oesie into [p]oesie.' The latter being of 'so subtle a spirit, that in pouring out of one language into another, it will evaporate, and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *Caput mortuum*.'²³⁵ Liberal translation remained the preferred method of regeneration of the aristocratic translators of the interregnum. One might also argue that Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the most liberal (re)creation of all, the beautifully-wrought poetical reproduction of the biblical retranslation of the Genesis story.

²³² Roger Ellis and Liz Oakley-Brown, 'British Tradition', in Baker, ed., p. 340.

²³³ Jeremy Munday, p. 25.

²³⁴ Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 63.

²³⁵ Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 63.

The Restoration saw a change in attitudes and, whilst praising Denham and fellow champion of the translator's freedom, Abraham Cowley, John Dryden put forward a manifesto for translation which, according to Ellis and Oakley-Brown, 'would shape theory and practice for the coming century.'²³⁶ Dryden categorises the translation process as being metaphrase, paraphrase or imitation. 'All translations,' asserts Dryden, 'may be reduced to these three heads.'²³⁷ The first is the mechanical 'turning' of an author, 'word by word, and line by line' from one language into another. Imitation is 'where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion.' Coming in the middle, occupying the liminal space, central to the life and works of Helen Maria Williams, paraphrase, 'translation with latitude', is 'where the author is kept in view of the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered.'²³⁸ Dryden closes his argument with a statement resounding with echoes of Williams's translational attitudes:

A translator that would write with any force or spirit of an original must never dwell on the words of his author. He ought to process himself entirely and perfectly comprehend the genius and sense of his author, the nature of the subject, and the terms of the art or subject treated of. And then he will express himself justly, and with as much life, as if he wrote an original: whereas he who copies word for word loses all the spirit in the tedious transfusion.²³⁹

Despite the clarity of argument here, elsewhere Dryden admits the difficulty of the task, comparing translating poetry to 'dancing on ropes with fettered legs.'²⁴⁰ Just as for Schleiermacher, Dryden asserts that, 'tis but a foolish task; for no sober man would put

²³⁶ Ellis and Oakley-Brown, in Baker, ed., p. 340.

²³⁷ John Dryden, 'On Translation', from Dryden's translation of *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), in Schulte and Biguenet, eds, p. 17.

²³⁸ Dryden, in Schulte and Biguenet, eds, p. 17.

²³⁹ Dryden, in Schulte and Biguenet, eds, p. 31.

²⁴⁰ Dryden, in Schulte and Biguenet, eds, p. 18.

himself into a danger for the applause if escaping without breaking his neck.’²⁴¹ Bassnett argues that Dryden is being ironic here, as he is in the Dedication to the *Aeneis* (1697) when he writes of translators as being ‘like labourers toiling away in someone else’s vineyard.’²⁴² Like Williams, Dryden, ‘played with metaphors of constraint,’ but again like Williams, ‘as a prolific translator, he acknowledged the skills required to translate, and [...] did not slavishly follow any of the originals with which he was engaged.’²⁴³ Similarly also to Williams’s modification of her initial revolutionary fervour, and Wordsworth’s tempering of his youthful enthusiasms, Ellis and Oakley-Brown record that Dryden modified his position in the *Dedication of the Aeneis*, which talks of steering a course between paraphrase and literal translation.²⁴⁴

Following Dryden’s advocating of a ‘middle ground’ strategy in translation practice, Pope, in the preface to his translation of the *Illiad* (1715-20), argued for mediatory approximation and the avoidance of the extremes of servile literalism or the excesses of liberal paraphrase. Pope’s translation was, in fact, a regeneration based on Dacier’s 1711 prose translation along with other English, French and Latin sources. One of the main objections to Pope’s *Illiad*, a collaborative venture with, among others, William Brome, a translator of Dacier, seems to have been that it should have found its basis in the work of a woman translator. For Ellis and Oakley-Brown, this points to a marked difference between the sexes in translation in this period and preceding periods. ‘No English woman had yet ventured to translate Homer,’ they argue: the language of adventure and travel into unknown alterity is striking and attests to the courage of women translators and women writers in general in a period of such suffocating patriarchal dominance.²⁴⁵ Ellis and Oakley-Brown mark the contribution of Aphra Behn and

²⁴¹ Dryden, in Schulte and Biguenet, eds, p. 18.

²⁴² Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 11.

²⁴³ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 11.

²⁴⁴ Ellis and Oakley-Brown, in Baker, ed., p. 340.

²⁴⁵ Ellis and Oakley-Brown, in Baker, ed., p. 340.

show the greater variety of translations conducted by women continuing into the eighteenth century with Elizabeth Carter's edition of the complete works of Epictetus (1749-52) and Charlotte Brooke's anthology of Irish poetry (1789), the first time anthologies of such works had been produced. Brooke's work contributed to the growth in popularity of Celtic literature, fuelled largely by the James Macpherson's pseudo-translations of Ossian, much of which will be examined in the chapter concerning Williams's translation of the Louis XVI letters.

A work of theory appeared at the opposite end of the period which had begun with Dryden's major theoretic contribution, a work in opposition to Dryden, Alexander Fraser Tytler's, *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1791). Systematic and thorough, the treatise was conservative and restrictive, an attempt to rein in the looseness of contemporary practice based in Dryden's methodology of paraphrase and, as discussed earlier, essentially centred on Tytler's three main principles:²⁴⁶

- 1) The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.
- 2) The style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- 3) The translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

The genius of the translator was of paramount importance in the transaction, but in far less an artistically creative position than that which Dryden had afforded his translator. It was familiarity, perfection even, with the foreign language and text which placed the translator at the centre of the process with the original text as the 'ultimate point of reference.'²⁴⁷

In language and style, Tytler's instructional essay belongs to an earlier tradition, a more generalist, Augustan or neo-classical didactic mode of expression than that which was

²⁴⁶ Bassnett, *Translation* p. 16

²⁴⁷ Ellis and Oakley-Brown, p. 341

championed by Romantic writers more interested in the vernacular of everyday language. The rationalism of Tytler's programme and the formalism of style were also characteristics against which the first Romantics had begun to react. We do not know if Williams was aware of Tytler's text, but it would seem appropriate to situate her within a movement against some of the reactionary, restrictive strictures. For Romantic translators far more artistic freedom must be asserted in the process of the foundation of regenerative, new works. A difficulty Shelley was considering, perhaps, when he compared the futility of translation to the casting of a violet into a crucible.²⁴⁸ In the Romantic view, according to Bassnett, the 'pre-eminence of the Imagination as opposed to the Fancy leads implicitly to the assumption that translation must be inspired by the higher creative force if it is to become more than an activity of the everyday world with the loss of the original shaping spirit.'²⁴⁹ This frame of mind suggests a realm of meaning outside of, but at the same time existing between, languages. The idea is very much of the Romantic moment, particularly, as we have seen, in Germany. It is also this sense of a commonality of extra-lingual understanding which pervades the work of Williams. She suspects that there is a realm of cognisance concerning societal structure and liberty of which all peoples have a sort of trace memory. By translating ideas through literature she provides the mediation from which to re-acquaint readers with this ideal space of understanding.

According to Ellis and Oakley-Brown, Romantic writers in England 'cut their teeth on translations from the German.'²⁵⁰ Coleridge had cut his teeth on Schiller, his reading of whom proved influential as did his translation of the German's *Wallenstein* (1800). Despite his view of translation as a lower-status activity, Shelley translated parts of Goethe's *Faust* and

²⁴⁸ 'Hence the futility of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as to seek to transfuse from one language to another the creations of a poet.' Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley from the original Editions*, ed by Richard Hearne Shepherd, 2 Vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906) <6/13/2016. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2583#Shelley_1633-02_19> [Accessed 13 June 2016]

²⁴⁹ Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 69.

²⁵⁰ Ellis and Oakley-Brown, in Baker, ed., p. 341.

German writers were increasingly translated into English.²⁵¹ According to Ellis and Oakley-Brown, the German Romantics were ‘crucial in shaping a new self-understanding for the translator.’²⁵² Williams provided much of the mediation of German translation theory by retransmitting ideas from the various sources with whom she became acquainted. Always intent on investigating, reproducing and promoting the foreign, she received, assimilated and regenerated French and German thought, a vibrant *mélange* of French socio-political thought bubbled with German literary-translational thought, together with Romanticism as mediated by Wordsworth among others. The idea of Williams as a centrality is key, and can be shown in an example of the filtering of French language through German ideas of foreignisation reproduced in an English text. In Letter XII from July 1815, she reports upon a carriage full of some ‘acquaintances’ returning from St Denis where they had gone to see the return of Louis XVIII following the ‘Hundred days’. Williams records that the city is not entirely supportive of the Bourbon restoration and that her acquaintances’ carriage was ‘assailed by volleys of stones, and their ears by the cry of “Traiterous (*sic.*) royalists! Hang them up, à la lanterne!”’²⁵³

Using the target language, English, to begin her description, Williams ends with the French (revolutionary) vernacular. A strategy very much consistent with her creatively-faithful mode of translation, most fully realised in *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, as will be discussed in a later chapter. The phrase, in maintaining the French, retains a note of terror, a resonance of the sublimity of the phrase *in situ*, which Williams is masterly in evoking. It is also politically-charged rhetoric and in forcing the reader to move to the author, in this case

²⁵¹ Despite, however, his friend Coleridge’s admiration for Germany and for German literature, Wordsworth remained unaffected by Germany, famously enduring a terrible stay in a small garret in Goslar over the winter of 1798-99. Having planned to travel to Germany for two years with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Dorothy stayed in Goslar whilst Coleridge travelled to Göttingen. Cut off due to the extreme cold and having failed to learn anything substantial of the language, the Wordsworths returned to England in April, 1799.

²⁵² Ellis and Oakley-Brown, p. 341

²⁵³ Williams, ‘Letter VII’, *A Narrative of Events Which have Taken Place in France from the Landing of Napoleon Bonaparte, on The First of March 1815, Till the Restoration of Louis XVIII with an Account of the Present State of Society and Public Opinion* (London: John Murray, 1815), p. 177.

revolutionary phraseology she forces the consideration of foreign political realities. The phrase echoes recollections contained in the 1790 letters:

As we came out of La Maison de Ville, we were shewn, immediately opposite, the far-famed lanterne, at which, for want of a gallows, the first victims of popular fury were sacrificed. I own that the site of La Lanterne chilled my blood within my veins. At that moment, for the first time, I lamented the revolution; and, forgetting the imprudence, or the guilt, of those unfortunate men, could only reflect with horror on the dreadful expiation they had made. I painted in my imagination the agonies of their families and friends, nor could I for a considerable time chase these gloomy images from my thoughts.

It is forever to be regretted, that so dark a shade of ferocious revenge was thrown across the glories of the revolution. But, alas! where do the records of history point out a revolution unstained by some acts of barbarity? When do the passions of human nature rise to that pitch which produces great events, without wandering into some irregularities? If the French revolution should cost no farther bloodshed, it must be allowed, notwithstanding a few shocking instances of public vengeance, that the liberty of twenty-four millions of people will have been purchased at a far cheaper rate than could ever have been expected from the former experience of the world.²⁵⁴

Shades of the apologist tone of Wordsworth's *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* are discernible here, as is the later 'still, sad music of humanity' pitied so earnestly in *Tintern Abbey* (1798). The dynamic-equivalence offered here by Williams reminds her readership of the foreignness of such barbarity (Fraistat and Lanser note Williams's note that the *Lanterne* could be translated as 'lamp-iron') whilst at the same time inviting to understand the necessity of such action to achieve the perfection of the revolution. As in much of her writing, and particularly her translations, expression was a political act. Williams's writing always had purpose even if, as we shall see in the chapter which analyses her prefaces, that purpose was not always as obvious as immediate appearances might suggest.

Two extracts from Letter VI of the *Letters Written from France 1790* present us with the means of circularity with which to close this chapter and to begin the next. We began with an examination of the notion of translator/traitor that so permeates translation writings, at least

²⁵⁴ Williams, 'Letter X', *Letters Written in France 1790*, p. 98.

in works pre-dating the twentieth century. Is Williams, in fact, both? Is she the traitorous translator of foreign political thought, dangerous and subversive to authorities at home and abroad? In Letter VI she reveals a preference for the French political intellectual class in their ability to put words into action, or the ‘principle of perfection’ which they believe ‘may be reduced to practice.’²⁵⁵ Traitorous, perhaps, but further in the letter, she reveals a duplicity in her strategy, one often repeated in her prefaces. Speaking of abolition, Williams cleverly plays with identity and national characteristics, appealing to the English through what feels always a forced or false admiration. Reporting on the progress of the abolitionist cause at the Assemblée Nationale, stilted by revolutionary events, she laments: ‘yet, perhaps, if our senators continue to doze over this affair as they have hitherto done, the French will have the glory of setting us an example, which it will then be our humble employment to follow.’²⁵⁶ No greater indignity would it be that an Englishman humble himself, humiliate himself, before the French! The tone is at once admiring, yet mocking, but gradually gives way to a more impassioned rhetoric:

I trust an English House of Commons will never persist in thinking, that what is morally wrong, can be politically right; that the virtue and prosperity of a people are things at variance with each other; and that a country which abounds with so many sources of wealth, cannot afford to close one polluted channel, which is stained with the blood of our fellow-creatures.²⁵⁷

Ever the Janus, however, Williams quickly readjusts her prose to appeal directly to national pride and in doing so points us towards an examination of her translatorial purposes, those stated and those concealed: ‘But it is a sort of treason to the honour, the spirit, the generosity of Englishmen, to suppose they will persevere in such conduct.’²⁵⁸ Treason against the spirit has been the charge against translators since antiquity and Williams bears consideration

²⁵⁵ Williams, ‘Letter VI’, *Letters Written from France 1790*, p. 82.

²⁵⁶ Williams, ‘Letter VI’, *Letters Written from France 1790*, p. 84.

²⁵⁷ Williams, ‘Letter VI’, *Letters Written from France 1790*, p. 84.

²⁵⁸ Williams, ‘Letter VI’, *Letters Written from France 1790*, p. 84.

against the same accusation in translation and in her play with identity and politics, here. 'Europe', she exclaims, 'is hastening towards a period too enlightened for the perpetuation of such monstrous abuses. The mists of ignorance and error are rolling fast away, and the benign beams of philosophy are spreading their lustre over nations.'²⁵⁹ The implication, though couched in such admiring language, is that England and the English had better acquaint themselves with the progressive, liberal politics of Europe if they are not to be humbled before the historic enemy, France, and the mysterious alterity of the German states. By means of a double bind, Williams forces a middle way and negotiates a path to the translation of an idea. In the next chapter, the idea which Williams cherished above all, the idea of liberty, charges her will to undertake what would become an albatross in her career. The translation of the letters of Louis XVI is a story of betrayal and misfortune, but one which stemmed from a most fervent desire to defend the revolution, a desire which led to Williams's most political and most controversial translation.

²⁵⁹ Williams, 'Letter VI', *Letters Written from France 1790*, p. 84.

Chapter 4

‘With what different feelings has *she* made this selection!’: Williams and The Strange

Case of the Letters of Louis XVI

In the 1946 essay, ‘Why I Write’, George Orwell famously offered the following explanation of the relationship between literature and politics:

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art’. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.²⁶⁰

Williams could have produced the same apologetic, under the title ‘Why I Translate’, transposing the words *political writing* and *write for translation* and *translate*, respectively. Her life’s work can be seen as an effort to draw attention to, to get a hearing for, the *fact* of the 1789 Revolution and the exposure of political deception and misinformation. Whilst it is sometimes less clear where her allegiances lie, her partisanship less clearly-defined perhaps, her sense of injustice was just as keen as Eric Arthur Blair’s and it was this empathetic capacity which drove her to undertake the reporting and translation of French politics.²⁶¹ This

²⁶⁰ George Orwell, ‘Why I Write’ from *Gangrel*, [No. 4, Summer] 1946, in, *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed Peter Davidson (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), v. 18, *Smothered Under Journalism*, p. 319

²⁶¹ Regarding partisanship, it is clear that Williams was on the side of the revolutionaries and was a Brissotin sympathiser. However, she becomes disillusioned with and critical of post-revolutionary authorities as she does

purpose, or *skopos* (a term which will be discussed in the chapter on prefaces to follow) is particularly true in the case of what is her most overtly political translation, *The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth: with Observations on Each Letter* (1803).²⁶² The observations on 'Letter XVI' show Williams's feeling for the political dimension within the space of literary expression. 'Imagination,' she writes, 'can scarcely paint a more melancholy scene than the meeting which took place between the venerable ex-minister [the 'illustrious Malesherbes'] and the king.'²⁶³ Here, Williams illustrates her pervading sense that the political is more penetrative than the artistic, or at least that the imagination is almost incapable of producing such effect as, if momentary, political reality. For Williams in France, art and politics are intrinsically linked, with the purpose of art being to mediate the truths of politics.

The work, in fact, according to Kennedy 'proved to be nothing but trouble for Williams,' the trouble arousing mainly from suspicions confirmed in 1820 that the letters purportedly written by Louis XVI were of dubious provenance.²⁶⁴ The book is indeed a work of art, but is an expression with its origins in a lie or, rather, lies. As such, it can be argued to occupy a place alongside other intriguing works in translation history, those works termed pseudotranslations which, whilst appearing to be or claimed by their authors as being works based upon existing sources (either historical or contemporary foreign sources), are in fact works originating with that same author. That is to say, there was no original source. The term also covers works which are supposedly *original* productions but which have been found, rather, to have been translations of existing works unknown in the target culture.

Pseudotranslation, defined by Anton Popovič as 'fictitious translation', is a mysterious space

later with Napoleon. This precludes certainty, once again, as does the difficulty with allying her to France, Britain or even Germany to any extent, in terms of nationalistic partisanal affinities.

²⁶² *Skopos*, the Greek word for 'purpose', was used to describe the translation theory of purpose developed by Hans Vermeer in the late 1970s. For more on *Skopos* Theory, see various translation works included in the next chapter and in the Bibliography here.

²⁶³ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 75. Indented quotation regarding Malesherbes, p. 74.

²⁶⁴ Kennedy, pp. 180-81.

of authorial uncertainty, a netherworld of literary undecidables to which Williams, unwittingly travelled.²⁶⁵ I suggest, rather than exploring Williams's *Correspondence*, in an intra-lingual, intra-cultural cross-examination as with other chapters here, we might analyse the piece with a view to placing it alongside pseudotranslations such as the Ossian poems, for example, as contributing to the Romantic canon in an untypical ways. We can further demonstrate, here, that Williams's idiosyncratic Romanticism finds its source in translation as *The Correspondence* exemplifies a prismatic expression of interconnections.

Published in 1803, *The Correspondence* has received scant critical attention, possibly due to the prosaic nature of its content and, no doubt, owing to the suspicious nature of its origination. After all, if the letters were manufactured, what can the historian hope to learn of the thoughts and motivations of the king? Lionel Woodward makes brief mention of the letters, from which source Kennedy derives the two paragraphs covering the work in her Williams monograph.²⁶⁶ It will suffice for the moment to mention that in April 1803 the letters were brought to Bonaparte's attention by police suspicious of the potential for *The Correspondence* garnering royalist support. Confiscated by the authorities, the published work was then attacked in the book-length repudiation by A. F. Bertrand de Moleville, the *Refutation of the Libel on the Memory of the Late King of France by Helen Maria Williams* (1804). Further tribulations were to attend Williams's edition of the letters as, according to Kennedy, 'several years later it was discovered that Williams had been duped by the people who sold her the letters. The correspondence was found to have been forged by the people who sold it to her, even though she had been assured that it was authentic.'²⁶⁷ Indeed, in her preface Williams is at great pains to assure her readership of the letters' veracity, a stance

²⁶⁵ Anton Popovič, *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1976), p. 20.

²⁶⁶ See Lionel Woodward, *Anglaise Amie de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1930).

²⁶⁷ Kennedy, p. 181.

which, to the reader armed with knowledge granted by history, hints at a slight desperation, if not an effort in authorial self-assurance.

Julia Douthwaite devotes a chapter to the public perception of Louis XVI in her recent monograph, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France*, in which she analyses the impact of Williams's editing of *The Correspondence* upon the public memory of Louis. Douthwaite argues that 'a look at the king's correspondence as edited by Helen Maria Williams (1803) seems to set the record straight by providing proof – or the semblance thereof – that shows why Louis XVI inspired both pity and contempt.'²⁶⁸ The semblance of truth was enough to provide the basis for the king's public image, according to Douthwaite, 'for the next generation as least.'²⁶⁹ Addressing the veracity of the *original*, Douthwaite records that, 'Williams's *Correspondence politique* was also charged with fraud: some claim that the letters were entirely invented. A comparison of key passages with the "official" correspondence published in 1864-73 (whose flaws in turn have been denounced by critics of the twenty-first century) reveals differences of tone and vocabulary, but the fatherly self-image and rhetoric of sacrifice remain.'²⁷⁰ Concerning the translation's genesis, Douthwaite affirms that the case for Williams's credulity is not sufficiently settled.

Woodward is the source of Kennedy's assertion that 'Babié de Bercenay admitted, in a letter of 10 October 1822, to forging the letters of Louis XVI.'²⁷¹ Woodward records the receipt of the letter by A. A. Barbier, writer and editor, a letter in which Babié stated, 'Je suis auteur de la *Correspondence de Louis XVI*: l'idée de ces lettres me fut suggérée par le comte Imbert de la Platière.' 'I am author of the *Correspondence de Louis XVI*: the idea was suggested to me

²⁶⁸ Julia Douthwaite, *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 100.

²⁶⁹ Douthwaite, p. 100.

²⁷⁰ Douthwaite, pp. 101-2.

²⁷¹ Kennedy, p. 244, n. 108.

by Count Imbert de la Platière.’ (Fr.)²⁷² The sources of the letters passed to Williams seem to have been François Babié de Bercenay and Sulpice Imbert de la Platière. An edition of 1870, the *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology*, lists Babié as ‘a prolific French writer on history, etc.’, with a note to ‘see Quérard, “la France Littéraire.”’²⁷³ Babié is listed in volume 1 of the 1827 edition of Quérard’s *La France Littéraire, ou Dictionnaire Bibliographique* as a grand-nephew of l’abbé Radonvilliers. Elected to the Académie Française in 1763, Claude-François Lyzarde de Radonvilliers was *sous-précepteur*, or sub-tutor to the four sons of the dauphin, Louis XV, including the future Louis XVI.²⁷⁴ According to Sophia Rosenfeld, Radonvilliers was already an ‘esteemed member of the Académie Française when he published his treatise *De la Manière d’apprendre des langues* in 1768.’²⁷⁵ A text with the title, *On the Manner of Learning Languages*, again illustrates the contemporary interest in language and theory, the intertextuality with Williams’s concern for linguistic diversity towards universality further informing the conception of Williams’s mediatory role.

Quérard’s lemma for Babié lists the Debray of Paris edition of the Louis XVI letters, ‘avec des notes de M^{lle} Williams’, ‘with notes by Miss Williams’ (Fr.) with a publication date of 1805.²⁷⁶ The note on the entry is as follows: ‘Imbert de la Platière a eu part à cette correspondance, qu’on a crue pendant quelque temps d’être authentique. *Barb.*’ ‘Imbert de la Platière had a part in this correspondence, which was believed for some time to have been authentic. *Barb.*’ (Fr.)²⁷⁷ The *Barb* is a reference to Quérard’s source, A. A. Barbier’s *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes* (2nd ed 1822-5). Noted by Woodward,

²⁷² Woodward, p. 234.

²⁷³ J. Thomas, A.M., M.D., *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1870), vol. 1, p. 232.

²⁷⁴ J-M. Quérard, *La France littéraire, ou Dictionnaire Bibliographique* (Paris; Firmin Didot, 1827), p. 145.

²⁷⁵ Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 9.

²⁷⁶ Quérard, p. 145.

²⁷⁷ Quérard, p. 145.

Barbier's editions detailed the controversy over the years following publication. Barbier also records the subterfuge by Babié and Imbert concerning an entry for *Titres (les) de Bonaparte à la reconnaissance des Français, par Sulpice de la Platière*, of which in the 1806 edition Barbier claims, 'le véritable auteur de cette ouvrage est M. Babié.' 'The real author of this work is M. Babié.' (Fr.).²⁷⁸ Shortened in the 1824 edition to, simply, '(ou plutôt M. Babié)' ('or rather, M. Babié') (Fr.).²⁷⁹ To paraphrase a trope of popular fiction, the two characters, Babié and Imbert, had previous form.

Biographical detail is frustratingly scant relating to Babié's accomplice, Sulpice Imbert, Comte de la Platière. The *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BnF) lists the following, most of which appears to have Quérard's volume four as its source:

Homme de lettres, biographe, historien et éditeur. - Membre de l'Académie des Arcades de Rome, des académies d'Orléans et d'Arras. - Auteur avec François Babié de Bercenay de correspondances apocryphes de Louis XVI. - Rédacteur, avec Labadut, du "Courrier de Paris ou Chronique du jour" (1795-1797)

Man of letters, biographer, historian and editor. Member of the *Académie Arcades de Rome*, the Academies of *Orléans* and *Arras*. – Author with François Babié de Bercenay of apocryphal letters of Louis XVI. Editor, with Labadut, of the *Courier de Paris ou Chronique du Jour* (*Paris Mail* or *Daily Chronicle*)²⁸⁰

Quérard does not give Imbert's dates, listed as 1755 – 18 in the BnF's *Atelier*. The entries in Quérard and in the BnF database contains a listing of a publication of Imbert's from 1802, the *Vie philosophique, politique et littéraire de Rivarol*, (*The Philosophical, Political and Literary Life of Rivarol*) (Fr.), the title page of whose first edition contains the ironic epigraph

²⁷⁸ Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes composés, traduits ou publiés en français, avec les noms des auteurs, traducteurs et éditeurs: accompagné de notes historiques et critiques*, (Paris : Imprimerie Bibliographique, 1806), pp. 378-9

²⁷⁹ Barbier *Dictionnaire...*, 2nd ed (Paris: Barrois l'Ainé, 1824), p. 323.

²⁸⁰ 'Sulpice Imbert de La Platière (1755?-18..)', from *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, <http://data.bnf.fr/atelier/13005120/sulpice_imbert_de_la_platiere/> [Accessed 18/12/15]; my trans.

from Rousseau, '[n]os [t]alens naissent avec nous, nos [v]ertus seules nous appartient.', 'we are born with our talents, only our virtues belong to us.' (Fr.)²⁸¹

The authors' virtue is questionable, if we accept Douthwaite's description of the pair as 'unscrupulous counterfeiters.'²⁸² Detail as to Williams's dealings with Babié and Imbert remains occluded and as Douthwaite confirms, 'it remains unclear how she could have been misled and why she undertook the venture.'²⁸³ Williams had been tricked and suffered deep humiliation at the ignominious reception of the work. Subsequently, she almost disappeared from the literary sphere, writing little over the following eleven years. For Douthwaite, however, 'ultimately, it matters little which letters were actually penned by the king or his imitators, for it is the public image of Louis XVI [...] that interests me most.'²⁸⁴ Following the same reasoning, I approach the final text from a perspective of assumption and acceptance that the forgery took place, towards an analysis of the work as a simulacrum, a pseudotranslation rendered more intriguing for Williams's innocence in the illusory process.

According to Robinson, a pseudotranslation is 'not only a text pretending, or purporting, or frequently taken to be a translation, but also [...] a translation that is frequently taken to be an original work.'²⁸⁵ The opening of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) provides a good example of the text in dissembling mode. The preface to the first edition begins: 'The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529.'²⁸⁶ It was, of course, nothing of the sort. The text was neither printed (in the black letter or not), not in Naples, nor anywhere

²⁸¹ Sulpice Imbert de la Platière, *Vie philosophique, politique et littéraire de Rivarol* (Paris: Barba, 1802)

²⁸² Douthwaite, p. 136.

²⁸³ Douthwaite, p. 136. For more on the entanglements of the case concerning Imbert, see also J-M Quérard, ed., *Les Supercheries littéraires dévoilées. Galerie des auteurs apocryphes, supposés, déguisés, plagiaires, et des éditeurs infidèles de la littérature Française, (Literary Deceptions Unveiled, A Collection of Apocryphal, Supposed, Disguised, Plagiarising Authors and Unfaithful Editors from French Literature)* (Fr. my trans.) (Paris: Querard, 1830).

²⁸⁴ Douthwaite, p. 102.

²⁸⁵ Douglas Robinson, 'Pseudotranslation', in Baker, ed., p.183.

²⁸⁶ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 1.

in Italy and was not discovered anywhere in England. It was conceived and written by Walpole. 'Generally speaking', continues Robinson, 'a pseudotranslation might be defined as a work whose status as "original" or "derivative" is, for whatever social or textual reason, problematic.'²⁸⁷ *The Correspondence* proved the most problematic of Williams's works in translation, not least because it secured Napoleon's attention, a reception which proved personally dangerous and professionally deleterious to her writing.

Robinson argues that problems of definition are compounded by, echoing Williams's uncertainty, lack of clarity over 'what a so-called real or authentic translation is,' and furthermore, 'because some texts have been presented one way by their authors and taken another way by their readers.'²⁸⁸ The intention, it seems, of those parties which provided Williams with the letters was to trick the translator into producing a document which, rather than adding support to pro-revolutionary discourse, would in fact give credence to royalist claims as to the injustice of the treatment of Louis XVI. From the adverse reaction to the publication, it seems that the plan worked. Unfortunately for Williams, the text was received in a very different way by her readers than that for which she may have hoped.

The most famous example of pseudotranslation, the example of which proving influential on the Romantics and Wordsworth in particular, is James Macpherson's Ossianic poems. This 'textbook case', according to Robinson, comprised *Fragments of ancient poetry translated from the Gaelic or Erse language* (1760), *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763), all of which had been passed as translations by Macpherson.²⁸⁹ After publishing his own, original poetry in the collection *The Highlander* to little acclaim, Macpherson, having collected a large body of Gaelic manuscripts and oral poetry, produced the *Ossian* poems (from Oisín, the Irish warrior-poet from the Fenian legends) as translations, claiming as his source the actual poet,

²⁸⁷ Robinson, in Baker, ed., p. 183.

²⁸⁸ Robinson, in Baker, ed., p. 183.

²⁸⁹ Robinson, in Baker, ed., p. 183.

Ossian, writing in the third century. However, as Robinson confirms, ‘it was not known at the time, nor would it be for another century, that no Gaelic manuscripts date back earlier than the tenth century.’²⁹⁰ The manuscripts from which Macpherson had claimed to have worked were, in fact, discovered to have been his own translation of his original poetry into Gaelic. According to Bassnett, ‘the existence of an ancient original was challenged, and he was branded a fraud.’²⁹¹ However, there was further activity in the case. Bassnett states that, ‘after his [Macpherson’s] death in 1796, [...] a committee was set up to investigate the case and concluded that although they may not have been “original” poems as such, nevertheless Macpherson had drawn upon traditional materials that he had amassed during his travels in the Highlands.’²⁹² The *Ossian* poems were influential on Romantic writers, proof, as they were, of an extant literary culture and lyrical art predating the modern age and free from ‘all the trappings of an advanced civilization, education, sophistication, carefully controlled classical form.’²⁹³ The *Ossian* poems provided further evidence for the necessity of literature which ‘arose from the collective imagination of each individual people, from the peasantry or common folk.’²⁹⁴ The model for Wordsworth’s radical approach in *Lyrical Ballads* and the paradigm from which much of the Romantic project drew its references and shaped its expression, the authenticity of Macpherson’s ‘translations’ was little questioned by Romantic writers, whose interest in the works’ veracity is clear. However, they were, nonetheless Macpherson’s own productions. They were a lie, of sorts, if we can claim such absolutes as factual truths in literary artefacts. But the poems clearly held some notion of truth for the Romantic mind and were doubtless valuable to the shaping of a Romantic response to pervading literary and socio-political mores towards the end of the eighteenth century (in fact, the realisation of Macpherson’s back-translated poems did not come until the end of the

²⁹⁰ Robinson, in Baker, ed., p. 184.

²⁹¹ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 29.

²⁹² Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 29.

²⁹³ Bassnett, p. 29.

²⁹⁴ Bassnett, p. 29.

nineteenth century). Similarly, we might claim the same willingness to believe on behalf of Williams, that the letters represented the truth about Louis XVI which allowed her a means of expressing something of her own truth about the 1789 revolution and the King's involvement. We can further suggest that, despite the later revelation of the letters' forged production, they contained the same truths from which Williams extrapolated her continued communication of the idea of revolutionary truth.

As we have seen in Walpole, the idea of the found-manuscript provides an ideal grounding from which to claim a pre-existing authorial voice which somehow grants a veracity and gravitas to an otherwise original work. However, the 'discovered text' allows the editor (read: the author) an opening for doubt as to original authenticity, whilst still claiming the text's actual basis, its existence as a literary object. The pseudotranslation in this sense, then, is a found object which, it is claimed, exists in a foreign language, a fact providing a much broader field of potential for the pseudotranslator. Horace Walpole was, according to Bellos, made to 'eat humble pie' when a second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* was required following the success of the first.²⁹⁵ Unable to produce the Italian original, the duplicity of the 'translation' was revealed. Bellos also cites the example of *The Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1669), first published anonymously in French. Translated by Rilke, among others, and referenced in the title of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's collection, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), the collection was the subject of several academic investigations in the first half of the twentieth century, all positing the courtier and friend of Boileau and Racine, Gabriel-Jospeh de Laverne, comte de Guillerages as the sole author of the letters in French.

Examples of the reverse process are numerous, many works have been passed as original, when in fact they have been translations of obscure or unknown foreign works, or of translations by the same author into the target language for a readership unaware of an

²⁹⁵ Bellos, p. 37.

existing original. Bellos, who has published a biography of Romain Gary, cites Gary's French translations of three of his own novels, presented as original French works as an example of passing-off.²⁹⁶ Indeed, the odds of discovering an obscure original or even of making any connection between two distant texts lead to Bellos's question: 'How many translations have been misrepresented as originals and never rumbled?' 'It can't be the case,' he suggests further, 'that every deception of the kind has already been unmasked.'²⁹⁷ Were it not for Babié's revelation in 1820, we may never have known the actual history of Williams's set of the Louis XVI letters. With its historical (mis)representation deriving from a non-original (in a sense) original, does Williams's text prove an ambiguous artefact? However, the work exists as a testament to the importance of her translational oeuvre in its position in the canon as a contribution to her revolutionary communication and, in a secondary sense, as an intriguing example of the pseudotranslational subgenre. 'What all such deceptions underscore,' Bellos argues, 'is that reading alone simply does not tell you whether a work was originally written in the language you are reading it in. The difference between a translation and an original is not of the same order as the difference between powdered and percolated coffee. It's more than just an idea.'²⁹⁸ The difference between Williams's translation and the 'original' is further complicated by the layer of intervention at the hands of Babié and Imbert. In a sense, we are at the mercy of historical fact in settling our definitions as to the worth of the work (if we can speak of such a thing as a historical fact). We are bound to accept that *The Correspondence* is based in a lie, but we can still extract from the reworking of this untruth, the truth of Williams's expression of her reaction to royalism and the challenge to liberty.

²⁹⁶ For analysis of Gary's contribution to Pseudotranslation, see Bellos's article, 'What Can We Learn from Literary Frauds?', in *Untitled Books*, Issue 50 December 2012; also see Bellos's biography, *Roman Gary: A Tall Story* (London: Harvill Secker, 2010).

²⁹⁷ Bellos, p. 38.

²⁹⁸ Bellos, p. 38.

To begin with, the translation provides Williams with the opportunity to present her 'Observations' on each letter. Despite its stated correlation to pre-existing text(s), this paratextual material is not entirely dependent on its original. The observations allow Williams to provide commentary consistent with her revolutionary narrative, which does not require an original in a sense of the physical object (the letters themselves), rather the object is the departing point for her to expand upon more general 'truths'. 'The Observations on the LXVIIIth and LXIXth Letters', show best Williams's rhetorical flight from the source. She writes:

Whenever we have occasion to contemplate Lewis the XVIth in a domestic point of view, we feel every sentiment of sympathy awakened in his favour; and lament that a mind, susceptible of the best affections of our nature, should have become the victim of those very affections, which, in other circumstances, would have been virtues, but which, in his situation, produced the effect of his crimes. His conjugal attachment led him into the most fatal errors, which terminated in the most bitter calamities. That sentiment, by its cruel seduction, destined him to suffer the pangs of remorse, almost without consciousness of guilt; since his mind seems to have been penetrated with the sense of every duty which he neglected, and with the sacredness of every obligation he violated. He loved the people he betrayed, and disapproved the projects of their enemies, with whom he irrevocably linked his fate. Unfortunate and misguided prince! while (*sic.*) abhorrent at the idea of shedding one drop of human blood, he condemned himself to call upon the coalesced powers of Europe to arm against his country; and millions have perished in its defence: and while he seems to have appreciated power and greatness at their true value, and to have felt the worth of being loved, he suffered himself to be dragged from the throne to the scaffold, rather than renounce the despotic empire, and be hailed as the father of his people.²⁹⁹

Writing with such poetic flair, such richness of imagery, Williams is not, in fact, observing anything explicitly contained within the two short letters which precede her commentary. She is, here, fully at the mercy of her revolutionary muse. It is fascinating to see the note of disdain afforded Marie Antoinette, his 'conjugal attachment'. There seems little expression of fellow womanhood in this tract. Again, it is difficult to define her alliances if we wish to portray her as a woman writer with any proto-feminist sense of sisterhood, here. What we

²⁹⁹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, pp. 61-2.

have is a *precis* of Williams's attitude to the king as an unfortunate, a victim in some sense of his own stupidity, at least of his naïve dependencies on unreliable relationships.

Such dubious interactions permeate this publication, as we have seen. Williams herself challenges the originators of *The Correspondence* in the 'Advertisement' separating the letters from a series of extracts, fragments and marginalia again purportedly originating from Louis XVI. The intention on the part of the French editors, Babié and Imbert, according to Williams, had been to divide the work into a first part, 'considered by the editors as a kind of moral gallery of paintings, more or less pathetic, which retraced the character of the king, under every form, and in various colourings.'³⁰⁰ The second section provides Williams with what she sees as her opportunity to prove Louis's foolishness and credulity. She introduces the selection accordingly, claiming that the 'French editors supposed' that the collection:

might one day become the manual of hereditary or elective princes; who, sacrificing their pride to the love of order, and their reasons of state to the logic of principles, would try to forget that they were kings, and remember that they were men. The editors have, we fear, indulged themselves in a delusion. Maxims are concentrated lessons of human wisdom: but it is not always he who reads or reasons wisely, that is wise.³⁰¹

The irony of such a declaration is pronounced. Throughout her observations over the entire work she refers variously to the king as the 'unfortunate' or 'misguided prince', we might similarly dub Williams, in this production, the 'unfortunate, misguided translator!' Whilst Williams's decision is clear: her agency in the process, her mediation, is that of communicating of the king's lack of intelligence (revealed through his own commentary); it is however self-damning in the extreme to inscribe a lesson on sense (or the lack thereof) in a work which has its basis in the dependence on a Williams's perceived lack of guile on the

³⁰⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III. P. 111.

³⁰¹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III. P. 111.

part of her deceivers. She may have read wisely, but was she herself wise in undertaking this project?

Her critics would respond negatively to this question. They may have gone further and refuted the assumption of her reading abilities, certainly of her capacity for reason. In a letter to *The Sentinel or British Miscellany and Review* of July 1804, one critic, *Candidus* believes that there was an original from which Williams made her translation. Incensed at Williams's 'stupid perversity', the critic vows to translate the letters himself and to provide commentary thereon.³⁰² 'It is my intention, Mr. Editor, to give the public a new translation of Louis the Sixteenth's Letters, and to make observations upon each, as my *tender-hearted* predecessor hath done before me: in this respect, at least, I shall imitate Miss Williams.'³⁰³ *Candidus*'s imitation would therefore be an imitation of an imitation, a further pseudotranslation? Not, if we accept that the letters, although forged, do present an original. Regardless, even with an original, if fake, set of letters, should the editor accept his version, he shall 'rejoice in having an opportunity of offering an antidote, however feeble, to the poison so insiduously (*sic.*) diffused.'³⁰⁴

Candidus is most enraged by Williams's style. Whilst assuring the editor that his criticisms are not gender-biased, he rails at Williams's 'insufferable presumption', a criticism oft-encountered in responses to Williams's writings throughout her life and one which formed the basis of Bertrand de Moleville's *Refutation*, discussed further.³⁰⁵ The presumption that a woman should deem the field of political writing a suitable space for expression is a constant source of ire for Williams's detractors and the *Sentinel*'s critic joins the ranks of those

³⁰² *Candidus*, 'Observations on Miss Williams's Translations of the Letters of Louis XVI', in *The Sentinel or British Miscellany and Review* (London, July 1804), p.11

³⁰³ *Candidus*, p. 14.

³⁰⁴ *Candidus*, p. 14.

³⁰⁵ *Candidus*, p. 11.

concerned with her persistent insolence. It is not for lack of understanding that he feels justified in his critique:

Fortunately for the softer sex (whose equal powers I recognise, in common with every unprejudiced mind), noble monuments of their dignity and genius have been raised in every age; and man hath long since acknowledged, with joy, that the wife he loves is also capable of being the friend he can respect.³⁰⁶

Noble monuments, silent statues who would certainly not move, not expose themselves so conspicuously as Williams, would not utter an opinion, certainly not on political matters. The criticism runs to question Williams's quality as a translator as much as for her presumption in attempting to attack such a subject:

The sentences, alternately flip-flop and turgid, into which Miss Williams hath turned the energetic language of Louis cannot fail of disgusting the reader, who is presented in each volume with the original letters, with which he must necessarily compare the translation.³⁰⁷

In her observations, Williams's prose is never turgid. This is the space in which she exercises her most poetic sensibilities, pouring forth her most highly-wrought language. Neither are the translations lifeless imitations. They may be described as flip-flop in the sense of the continuous interaction between fidelity and creativity, characteristic of Williams's style, but they are vibrant and playful. Not, it must be said, as experimental as the more literary translations. We might surmise that the large degree of fidelity with which she transposes the letters is, in large part, due to the necessity of her reliance on the original evidence with which to prove her case. Many of the regenerations are small revisions. For example, in 'Letter XVIII', from Louis (or Babié) to the scientist, Lavoisier, Williams renders the following: 'cette decouverte prouve que vous avez agrandi la sphère de connaissances utiles',

³⁰⁶ *Candidus*, p. 11.

³⁰⁷ *Candidus*, p. 14.

as ‘this discovery proves that you have enlarged the sphere of human knowledge.’³⁰⁸

Williams’s version, faithful to the last point (a more literal rendering of *connaissances utiles* would be *useful knowledge*) rings with greater gravitas than the original thereby adding to the sense of seriousness with which the reader is to read the work.

But, the question of Lewis, not Louis in the title? A strange, Brittanic (in fact, Welsh) metamorphosis. In the first instance we should say that it seems obvious that Williams would alter the name so as to appease British readers. Paul and Virginia are renamed, of course. But, the foreignness here would not be inappropriate. British readers would be well used to reading and hearing Louis, spelt and pronounced in the French. The renaming of a king assumes a mantle of momentous subjective agency and it also provides Williams just the distance she needs to paint a literary portrait based on a characterisation, rather than on the physical being. In this way, Williams sets herself up as supreme arbiter, mediator of not only the revolutionary story but, in a reflection of republicanism, she allows herself the project of renaming him, thus bringing his status to equable with those subject to his rule. By reclaiming the character of the king as simple a man, a man with the unassuming, non-regal name of Lewis, Williams reinscribes her universalist, progressive programme. With this strategy she is able to present the king, warts and all, and therefore present a challenge to pervasive views of patriarchal, dynastic monarchy as being derived from some power outside the understanding of men and, certainly, of women.

Williams allows herself the liberty of remoulding the king’s own commentary for her readers in order to reinscribe revolutionary principles. In a selection of ‘Pensées de Louis XVI sur certains Auteurs anciens et modernes’ (‘Thoughts of Louis XVIth, on some Authors, ancient and modern.’), Williams translates, faithfully in this instance, the following:

³⁰⁸ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I., pp. 184 and 185

Si Rousseau, avec son caractère atrabilaire, eût soupçonné le mal que produiront un jour ses écrits, je suis persuadé qu'il ne les aurait jamais mis au jour. Il est en cela contraire à Voltaire, qui aurait émis sa pensée, quand même il eût été assuré qu'elle aurait bouleversé un état. C'est un homme qui avait encore plus d'orgueil que d'esprit.

If Rousseau, with his atrabilarious character, had suspected the evils of which his writings would one day be the source, I am persuaded that he would never have suffered them to see the light. On this point, he forms a contrast with Voltaire, who would have ushered forth his thoughts, even had he been certain that they would overthrow a state. He was a man who had still more pride than wit.³⁰⁹

Williams's self-assured commentary, a few pages later, reflects a sentiment towards

Rousseau which would be expected of a writer of such pro-revolutionist sympathies:

It is doubtful whether the king be not too candid in his opinion respecting Rousseau: still more to be suspected is the accuracy of his judgement with respect to the result of Rousseau's philosophic writings. His opinion of Voltaire is severe, but seems to be better founded.³¹⁰

Here, Williams performs a dutiful, accurate translation, but modifies the effect with her decisive appended note. The dismissal of Voltaire is amusing, but the king's judgement is decidedly suspect with regard to Rousseau. As a revolutionary literary hero, Rousseau was also championed by the Romantics, not least for his philosophical genius and his part in the revolutionary narrative is essential to Williams's maintenance of her guiding principles.

Williams's original genius, her creativity, is used to inject drama into the scene overall, stating early in that, '[t]he whole of this correspondence may be called the secret history of the sorrows of Lewis the XVIth.'³¹¹ The line, a title more suited to contemporary tastes and one which would secure a greater readership than its existing, more prosaic descriptive, excites the reader's curiosity immediately with such intimations of hidden knowledge. The sensation of dramatic discovery is further enriched, with Williams stating that:

³⁰⁹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 160 and 162.

³¹⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 165.

³¹¹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 35.

Almost every letter exhibits the mind of the king weighed down by some new stroke of misfortune, or engaged in a cruel struggle between his affections and his duties. We are now hastening to the catastrophe of this melancholy drama: its subject is one of the most tragical which imagination can conceive; and it is attended with those incidents which heighten the interest, as we draw nearer to the close.³¹²

Williams assumes on the roles of narrator and chorus, here, positioning herself as the guide on the revelatory voyage of her own (re)creation. She never lost her sense of the theatrical, a consciousness which had first been so ecstatically awakened in 1790 at the first and lasting experience of the sublime (in) performance.

In 'Letter XVI', she revises Louis's, 'je porte dans mon coeur tout ce qui a été fait dans cette séance où tous les privilèges ont été sacrifiés', as 'I feel engraven on my heart the transactions of that sitting in which all privileges were renounced.'³¹³ The metaphorical inscription on the king's heart speaks (the more literal would be 'I carry in my heart') of a far more deeply felt experience of those who, with a note of a religious recanting, renounced rather than simply sacrificed their former privileges. The entire collection is replete with such small, but significant re-imaginings, all the time Williams peppers the faithful communication of the king's speech with language which adds colour and depth to the imagery and evocations. Overall, however, the text is faithful in linguistic transposition, a strategy by which Williams can assert her expertise and thereby comment on each letter according to a palimpsestic translation *à vitre*. In doing so she re-emphasises the king's voice throughout and is able to, then, suggest, his culpability in his own downfall. An example of this from volume III serves to illustrate the point. It is worth reproducing a large extract here in order to establish the terms by which I argue the strategic implications at hand:

³¹² Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 35.

³¹³ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I., pp. 200 and 203

Il faut, mon frère, vous donner une idée d'une scène bien scandaleuse. Je vous ai parlé de certaines propositions qui m'ont été faites par deux partis, qui souvent votent ensembles aux Jacobins. Ces hommes, qui se détestent cordialement, qui déjà paraissent se méfier les uns des autres, et qui finiront par se faire une guerre à outrance, voudroient, je ne sais pas trop pourquoi, me ranger sous leurs bannières. Insensibles à leurs promesses, à leurs menaces, sourd à leurs invitations, j'ai constamment refusé de servir leurs projets. Ils ont voulu me faire peur. Une députation de l'assemblée m'avait été envoyée pour des objets importants. On a réussi à composer cette députation d'hommes exaltés, de ces têtes mal organisées qui brusquent les convenances, et qui se croient les égaux des rois, et les êtres libres par excellence, parce qu'ils ont forts poumons, qu'ils recurent en partage le don de injures, et qu'ils ne savent jamais respecter le malheur.

I must relate to you, my dear brother, a most scandalous scene. I mentioned to you that certain propositions had been made me by two parties who often vote on the same side as the Jacobins. Those men, who cordially detest each other, who have all the feelings of mutual distrust, and who will end by waging among themselves a war of extermination, with, I know not why, to enlist me under their banners. Unmoved by their promises or threats, and deaf to their invitations, I have uniformly refused to second their projects. They have endeavoured to intimidate me. A deputation of the assembly was sent to me on important matters. They contrived to form a deputation of persons of exaggerated opinions, wrong-headed men, who offend against all propriety, and fancy themselves the equals of kings, and superlatively free, because they are possessed of strong lungs, are adepts in the talent of abuse and know not how to respect misfortune.³¹⁴

With recognition of Bassnett's refusal of perfection, this is an almost immaculate

rendering.³¹⁵ When we come to the observation on this letter, the supporting evidence for

Williams's adherence are brought out. She writes:

It appears that various propositions had been made to the king by two parties in the assembly—one, which, from his description, were the Girondists, and the other the Cordeliers, known afterwards in the Convention by the name of the Mountain. Insensible to their caresses, and despising their threats, the king boasts of holding the balance of refusal equal between them, and takes offence (which was perfectly natural) at the ill-organised heads of those, who think themselves the equals of kings, and free being *par excellence*, because they have strong lungs, and the talent of saying rude things.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., pp. 1-3 and 5-6.

³¹⁵ Bassnett has often stated variations on the idea that one can no more speak of a perfect translation than one can specify a perfect play or a perfect novel.

³¹⁶ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, pp. 9-10.

Williams is expert in implication, here. Firstly, the use of the simple, ‘boasts’ evokes the image of an unduly self-satisfied, but foolish figure. More importantly, Williams describes the two parties in question as the *Girondists*, or *Girondins*, and *The Mountain*, or *Les Montagnards*. The *Girondins* had formed out of the *Brissotins*, led by Williams’s friend, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and were considered the more moderate party against the more aggressive *Montagnards*, led by Robespierre. The *Girondins* were later systematically arrested with many of them executed under the *Montagnard* (subsumed as *Jacobin*) rule. Whilst she presents both parties in correspondence to the king in the passage, the suggestion is heavily weighted towards the depiction of the Jacobins as the aggressive force and the one which she positions herself against. Later in this observation, Williams once again allows herself the platform of unrestrained political commentary. The *Feuillants*, the more aggressive still of the contending parties (many of whom would be later executed, others of whom would become Jacobins under Robespierre) are accused of selfishness and deception towards the ‘puny personage’ of the king.³¹⁷ Despite her self-styling as dispassionate *rapporteuse*, her allegiances are clearly signposted here, as is her disdain for the ignominious figure of the unfortunate monarch.

Canidus makes a further criticism to *The Sentinel* in August 1804 in which he provides examples of select letters, criticising Williams for her shoddy scholarship and unfounded conjectures, rounding on her approach with the ‘very homely saying [...] applicable to this lady’: “‘None are so blind, as those that will not see.’”³¹⁸ The critique is, perhaps, appropriate in terms of Williams’s credulity as to the letters’ provenance, but more importantly at her ‘blind’ allegiance to revolutionary ideology. A similar critique, the strongest literary attack on Williams as a woman and as a writer, came in 1804 from the pen of Bertrand de Moleville.

³¹⁷ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 11.

³¹⁸ *Canidus*, ‘Observations on Miss Williams’s Translation of the Correspondence of Louis XVI; With a New Translation.’, in *The Sentinel or British Miscellany and Review* (London, August 1804), p. 77.

The royalist émigré, the Comte Antoine François Bertrand de Moleville had fled Paris in 1792 following a petition raised against him and four others at the High Court in Orléans, accusing them of counter-revolutionary activities whilst in post as ministers under Louis XVI. During his residency in London, where he remained until 1814, Bertrand de Moleville published various works, including a book on the costumes of the hereditary states of the house of Austria (1804), translated by a Mr. Dallas. R.C. Dallas is also the translator appearing on the title page of the work from the same year, *A Refutation of the Libel of the Memory of the late King of France, published by Helen Maria Williams, under the title of Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth*. The work explodes with anger from the outset, as a paragraph from the introduction shows:

This scandalous production is announced to the public as the work of Helen Maria Williams, a woman whose wretched pen has been long accumulating on itself disgrace after disgrace by writings of a similar nature. Had she concealed her name and only declared her sex, her libel would probably have been attributed to a wife or a widow of one of the judges of Louis XVI, were it not thought to surpass even the spirit of barbarity displayed by those wretches; for they, when the king was dead, had at least humanity enough to suffer his ashes to rest in peace. Not so Mrs Helen Maria. A stranger in France, where her own unbridled rage for democracy, and the general contempt of her countrymen, had compelled her to take refuge, this dotting superannuated fondler of the revolution impudently seizes on the privilege of posterity, and, appointing herself at once the Attorney-General and Judge of future generations, now cites before her the shade of Louis XVI, arraigning his memory in documents pretended to be genuine and lately recovered and pronounces him convicted of falsehood, perfidy, and treason against his people.³¹⁹

As well as the criticisms deriving from her status as a woman, Bertrand is critical of Williams for deviating from the truth. A reading of the *Correspondence*, in fact reveals that the very infidelities to a subjective revolutionary truth at which Bertrand stands in such violent opposition, show the duplicity of his own reaction to Williams and the work. Williams, it

³¹⁹ Antoine François Bertrand de Moleville, *A Refutation of the Libel on the Memory of the late King of France, published by Helen Maria Williams, Under the title of Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth*, by A. F de Moleville (Minister of State), trans. from an Original Manuscript by R. C. Dallas (London: Cadell and Davis, 1804), pp. 1-2.

seems, is not the only writer capable of producing a dissembling preface. Despite his claims as to the desire to reclaim Louis XVI's reputation in his preface to the *Refutation*, Bertrand may have been attempting to rescue his own literary name.

Illuminating some of the hidden communications in the court of Louis XVI, Bertrand's *Histoire de la Révolution de France, pendant les dernières années du règne de Louis XVI* is valued by Williams as a source text in the construction of *The Correspondence*. In the observations to 'Letter LXIV', however, she sets up an ingenious matrix of criticism, whilst allowing herself use of that information which supports her case. In a lengthy section which does not address the letter itself for some time, Williams gives her own critique of Bertrand, much of which is cleverly disguised among generalisations:

Although numerous volumes have been published on the French revolution, there is no point on which their authors seem to be more agreed, than that the time for writing the history of this important epocha has not arrived. No event, which has taken place in the annals of the world, being more stupendous than that of this mighty revolution, nor any in which the feelings of men have been more deeply interested, we must, in perusing the memorials transmitted to us even by those who have been actors in the scenes they relate, guard against mistaking the pleadings of advocates, for the letter of the law. Yet, even to those partial writers, the future historian will have great obligations: the vanity of some, and more reprehensible motives in others, will have furnished him with important information, which might otherwise have remained unknown; and so much more credit may be given to this information, if it contain evidence against the cause which such writers are most anxious to defend. [...] when the partisans of the court, or the secret ministers of its counsels, lay before the world its most intimate designs, when conspiracy, and even acts of treason, are vaunted, as some great secret of state, or stupendous achievement of glory—however we may smile at the mistake, or condemn the perfidy of the narrator, we are not displeased at being initiated into his mysteries, or made acquainted with the detail of his crimes.

Such are the ideas which necessarily present themselves in perusing the Annals, or history of the revolution, written by M. Bertrand de Moleville, for a short time minister of the marine, under Lewis the XVIth; and, according to his own account, the most secret depository of the royal counsels, before and after his own dismissal.³²⁰

Dismissing Bertrand's contribution, first of all, as simply one of many volumes, she at once criticises his work as having mistaken, even perfidious motives, whilst securing its place as a

³²⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, pp. 19-20.

useful source for that material she deems appropriately reliable. The pleasure with which she makes this dismissal is palpable, there is a certain *Schadenfreude* discernible in the attack on the errors of a revolutionary historian other than herself.

Williams hopes (with a wry smile) that Bertrand has been ‘misled only by a culpable vanity’ into boasting of ‘intimacies which he never shared.’³²¹ Taking Bertrand’s account very much with an air of contempt, she does wish, though, to concentrate on his account of certain events. She accuses Bertrand of ‘treasonable counsel’ in suggesting to the king that he send Mallet du Pan on an errand of negotiation with foreign powers in 1792.³²² Until this suggestion from Bertrand, Williams describes the king’s communications as, whilst not pro-revolutionary, they are certainly not counterrevolutionary. ‘It is to be observed,’ she says, ‘that till the king received this treasonable counsel, he talks in his correspondence, of his adherence to the constitution as the rule of government, and had adopted the wisest mode of enforcing (*sic.*) the general belief of his upright intentions, by the election of patriotic ministers, who, unlike their predecessors, loved what they had sworn to execute.’³²³

The linguistic potentialities of the notion of *execution*, allow Williams the intimation of Bertrand’s culpability in the king’s fate. No wonder, then, that Bertrand de Moleville wished to mount such a vociferous attack on Williams’s version of the letters. The intertextualities of Williams and Bertrand are played out in the pages of *The Correspondence* with responses and counter arguments reminiscent of Burke and Paine’s pamphlet war. Stating the case for the *Girondins*, Williams asserts that ‘M. Bertrand de Moleville has disclosed their project of demonarchising France.’³²⁴ Williams rallies to their cause with an impassioned, yet characteristically guileful defence:

³²¹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 20.

³²² Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 21.

³²³ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 21.

³²⁴ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 25.

It would be rendering unworthy service to the memory of those illustrious martyrs of liberty, to offer an apology for their principles. I knew them well, and believe that they had for the most part a predilection for republicanism: but such attachment, in the purest minds, is very consistent with a due obedience to the will of the majority; and, as the voice of the nation had fixed the constitution, the party of the Gironde felt it their duty to follow the path chalked out, rather than to trace another, when ignorant whither it would lead.³²⁵

It may well have been an unworthy service, but Williams does it anyway. Shades of the unstated statements of hidden criticism, here, allow her the space to mount the defence of her illustrious *Girondins*, the *purest minds*, against the ‘ignoble and barbarous tyrants’, the Jacobins under Robespierre.³²⁶ The observations on the letter to the King of Prussia are harsh in tone. In a brutal attack on Bertrand, she states:

There is a long history in M. Bertrand’s *Annals*, in which this writer pretends that the baron de Breteuil had changed the date of his letter [...]. The reasons which M. Bertrand brings as proof of this charge, are too despicable for animadversion. [...] [h]e must be a very candid reader [...] who should presume, that from the perusal of M. de Bertrand’s *Annals*, he has gained any very exact or precise knowledge of the history of the revolution.³²⁷

The unfêted and unofficial historian, Williams, always felt herself to be the most suitable mediator, the ideal communicator of an objective revolutionary truth. Unfortunate, then, that she should become the mediator of an (un)truth in the edition of the letters. It is, again, surprising that in light of her dismissal of Bertrand’s pretences she appoints herself as mediator of the king’s thought, deeming herself appropriately equipped with such knowledge as to correct and amend some of his observations contained within the second part of the work. Criticisms of presumption may be levelled, but that they should stem from the grounds of biological determinism negates any credence they may be afforded.

³²⁵ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 25.

³²⁶ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 78.

³²⁷ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., p. 96.

As usual, criticism stems from Williams's sex and the presumption of such a woman to permit herself the liberty of writing on geo-politics. We might overlay Bertrand's critique over that of *Candidus*, which is equally disdainful of an insolent woman:

The first paragraph of Miss Williams's preface is intended to be so imposingly philosophical, and is in reality so ridiculously shallow, that a lord of the creation, casting his eyes over it, would be tempted to exclaim,---"Milton, when he drew the portrait of female excellence in the partner of Adam, knew much better than the writers of the present day the true talents and destination of women: see, what impertinent nothings they say in the most pompous jargon! And with what insufferable presumption!"³²⁸

One wonders always if the same language would have been crafted against a man producing the same text. The sexism is barely contained, even the seemingly innocuous noun, 'woman' is loaded with scorn and incredulity in the first sentence of Bertrand's diatribe. The irony of writing against Williams as a 'stranger' in France, whilst himself an émigré resident in England is amusing as is the assumption of the contempt felt against her (surely Bertrand's accuser, Claude Fauchet, and others count as his countrymen). The spleen with which Bertrand takes up her revolutionist tendencies is extraordinary. The epithet, 'superannuated fondler of the revolution' belongs with Walpole's 'scribbling trollope' as examples of the kind of 'unbridled rage', to quote Bertrand, with which male writers attempted to dismiss her.³²⁹ In *The Sentinel*, the drawing of a comparison with the biblical *Genesis* is loaded with the referential associations as to the entirety of the calamities of history traceable to Eve's original crime. In translating Louis, Williams endeavours to explain the ways of kings to men, thus the evocation of Milton as master authority (in conversation with God, himself) provides the image with which to finally damn the presumptuous Williams.

³²⁸ *Candidus*, July 1804, p. 11.

³²⁹ Walpole cited in Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 54.

In the ‘Supplementary Letters’, Williams explains their inclusion, describing the selection as having been ‘most favourable to the end proposed, namely the complete justification of Lewis XVIth.’³³⁰ The self-affiliation to Milton is presumptuous indeed, but nonetheless, in some respects, appropriate. *The Correspondence* is a large-scale work, not strictly epic in any technical sense, but nevertheless a work of great proportions and of grand intentions. In characteristically subversive style, Williams inverts the formula of Milton’s justifying the ways of God to men, creating a justification of the ways of men to God and his earthly monarchical representatives. In fact the text aims to do both things, to explain, to justify and to celebrate events and revolutionary philosophy, and to explain and to justify, at least to position, the king. Williams’s unfortunate insistence that these letters were ‘confided to [her] by authority the most indisputable’ is Miltonic in its resonances with the indisputable authority of the Bible, the very word of God, from which Milton creatively translated the story of the beginnings of humanity.³³¹ Williams’s source was of a less venerable heritage, though she did not know it. This does not prevent her, however, from assuming the mantle of crusading bearer of truth as delivered by a higher authority (in terms of the recognized hierarchical societal structure of the constitutional monarchy). In the advertisement to the second section of Volume III, discussed earlier, described as the potential ‘manual of hereditary or elective princes’, Williams states the hope that future kings might, ‘try to forget that they were kings, and remember that they were men.’³³² The collective noun, *men*, here close to language of kings, grabs the reader already attentive to Miltonic traces in this *justification*. Williams is justifying the ways of men to kings, and to God. The desire to explain the actions of forces opposed to injustice drives the work she produces in her volumes of letters and in translation. In this project, Williams rarely distinguishes between gender-specific depictions, she often uses the term, *men*, in a gender-neutral way to speak of

³³⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., p. 79.

³³¹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., p. 81.

³³² Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., p. 111.

a common humanity. No doubt she felt sharply the unnatural inequalities of men and women, but it is testament to her sense of universalism that she rarely makes this distinction. She makes no criticism of Louis's manhood throughout, marking most fervently the difference between kings and men. She is most satisfied at a moment when, 'Lewis forgot for a time that he was a king, and gave way to his generous feelings as a man.'³³³

No such generous feelings can be attributed to the writer in the *British Critic*, a man who follows the familiarly tedious line of critique to which Williams often found herself subjected. 'When a female forsakes the ordinary pursuits and employments of her sex,' the piece begins, 'we are only enabled to approve it from satisfactory proofs of exalted talents, unusual sagacity, and the most cautious adherence to moral rectitude.'³³⁴ A female writer is to be pre-judged for having the temerity to venture into other territory than that appropriate to female mores. Strangely, she must demonstrate a morality and superiority of knowledge and skill for the work itself to be worthy of review and judgement. Sadly, it seems, Williams falls short:

But when we find a woman pronounce with dogmatical and peremptory decision on matters which involve the fate of empires and the happiness of millions, whose extremest ambition has never soared to any of the higher branches of literature, and who has only been distinguished among sciolists (?) for a certain facility of verifying and vivacity of description, it is impossible that we should feel anything but a mixture of pity and contempt.³³⁵

The same tone as with much other criticism, particularly that of Bertrand, is applied with regard to Williams's loyalties. Having 'precipitated herself into the vortex of the French Revolution', she had 'connected herself in ties of no common intimacy with some of its most atrocious characters.'³³⁶ Most damning of all is the likening of Williams to a lovesick girl in her adherence to pro-revolutionist principles. 'That same infatuation,' the reviewer mourns,

³³³ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III., p. 10.

³³⁴ *The British Critic* Vol 23 (London, April 1804), p. 427.

³³⁵ *The British Critic*, p. 428.

³³⁶ *The British Critic*, p. 428.

‘continues to mislead her.’³³⁷ Poor unfortunate Williams, blinded by love and misled by passion as only a woman could be. This critic suspects the deception concerning the origin of the letters, making Williams a victim of betrayal, but it is the wider conception of female gullibility with which he seems most concerned. Unfortunately, for Williams, the claim as to her betrayal by revolutionists is a valid one as, of course, the revolution descended into corruption in the confusion and paranoia of the Terror. However, again, one questions whether language of love, emotion, naivety and associated terms would have been employed to challenge the work of a male writer. In the *traduttore/traditore* paradox, Williams is the subject of perfidy several times over, here, and is rather *translator/betrayed* than the betrayer.

The *British Critic* positions itself as an exposé and purveyor of truth:

It is nevertheless a duty we owe to the public, to point out misrepresentation and expose fallacy, particularly when they are circulated under the plausible colour of a name which once enjoyed a certain degree of popularity. We do not deny Miss Williams all pretensions to talent, but we unequivocally deny her being possessed of those qualities of mind which are essential to decide on the profound subjects of the political affairs and constitutions of nations.³³⁸

It is extraordinary that such criticism should stand against a writer who wrote from the very heart of Parisian politics. That the writer should deem himself the more capable of addressing political action in the French capital from the distance of London seems ridiculous. But, of course, the fact that Williams is in Paris, closely acquainted with a vast number of French radicals, politicians and other public figures is neither here nor there. Her womanhood negates any capacity for the ‘qualities of mind’ the reviewer denies so unequivocally. Not only was Williams the target of such gender-determined criticism for the audacity of her reportage in the volumes of letters from France, but in her attempts to translate the revolution she was victim to exactly the level of abuse following exactly the same lines of attack.

³³⁷ *The British Critic*, p. 428.

³³⁸ *The British Critic*, p. 430.

The piece finally returns to suspicions as to the authenticity of the original letters:

We beg leave to repeat our doubts of the authenticity of many of these Letters, which appear to contradict the situation, circumstances, manners, and sentiments of him to whom they are ascribed.³³⁹

The critic had earlier cleverly laid the seeds of these doubts:

We shall not enter into the question of the authenticity of these Letters, though from internal evidence we may be allowed to suspect many of them; but one thing must be obvious to every reader, that the animadverter shows astonishing activity in dissecting them and garbling them, that some single word or solitary phrase may be distorted, to justify disapprobation of the writer's principles.³⁴⁰

The reviewer manages to say everything by proposing to say nothing. Denying the intention to discuss the matter allows for the implication to be established, whilst relieving the writer of any responsibility of having made the charge. Duplicity and subterfuge permeate so much of the interaction surrounding this publication. Forgery is at its very heart and touches so many of the disparate interrelationships in play. Suspicion over the letters was widespread, as a letter to Francis Horner M.P. of August 1803 shows. Sir James Mackintosh wrote to Horner that:

Miss Williams's observations (or rather Stone's, for I am persuaded they are his) on Louis XVI.'s letters are, to be sure stupid and malignant to the last degree. [...] I do not believe in the authenticity of *all* the letters; there is no evidence produced of it, and some of them have a sententious and ostentatious cast, very unlike the simplicity of the poor king's mind and style.³⁴¹

Again, Williams, criticised for her presumption in translating the *poor king's mind*, is dismissed as not possessing the understanding of Louis XVI's psychological constitution in

³³⁹ *The British Critic*, p. 431.

³⁴⁰ *The British Critic*, p. 428.

³⁴¹ Sir James Mackintosh, 'Letter XLI from Sir James Mackintosh, 26 August 1803', in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Francis Horner, M. P.*, ed by Leonard Horner, 2 vols (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1853), Vol. I., pp. 241-2. Williams was known to have collaborated with John Hurford Stone and Thomas Christie on the 3rd volume of her *Letters from France* (1792), in fact she contributed very little of her own work to the volume by comparison. Whilst they never married, Williams and Stone lived together throughout their life in France and it was often claimed that Stone was the author of much of her work, if only for the fact that it was often assumed that, again, as a woman Williams could not be capable of such politically charged writings.

the same way as that with which Mackintosh feels himself furnished. The idea of Williams's contribution to pro-revolutionist literature as 'stupid and malignant' seems a bizarre accusation from the author of *Vindiciae Gallicae: A Defense of the French Revolution and its English Admirers* (1791). However, Mackintosh's later retraction of his original views aligned him with Burke and when visiting Paris in 1802 he famously declared to admiration of his *Defence* by stating: 'Messieurs, vous m'avez si bien refuté', 'Sirs, you have well refuted me!' (Fr.). The attack on Williams does not seem so unusual in this light, but the accusation that the letters do not accurately reflect the king's mind seems an accusation too far. It is the simplicity of the king's mind that Williams is so keen to establish as largely the means of his downfall. Furthermore, by what qualification does Mackintosh assume himself more capable of knowing the king's mind than Williams? Of course, for Mackintosh, it is Williams's long-term companion, Stone, who directs from the wings. Is there a suggestion that Williams has been further duped? Tricked into publishing a work of such malignancy by the shadowy Stone? The chicanery surrounding the case, again, touches all aspects of the work.

Despite, however, Mackintosh's suspicions as to Stone's involvement, it is Williams who is singled out for punishment. Even if she is the victim of duplicity on the part of Stone and of those from whom she had received the letters, it is she who, being a woman of course, must be held responsible. With the air of a schoolmaster, fittingly for such a patriarch, Mackintosh casts Williams as the naughty girl, stating that, 'she deserves a very severe castigation for dulness (*Sic.*) and malevolence.'³⁴² It is not Stone who is singled out, but Williams, betrayed once again and forced to accept unwarranted reproof.

Concerned with Williams's effect from the opposite side of the political field, Bertrand is no less harsh in his admonition. Much of Bertrand's criticism is levelled at Williams's preface.

³⁴² Mackintosh, in Horner, ed., p. 242.

Indeed, Bertrand finds Williams guilty of the *skopos-aequivocus* I suggest in the next chapter.³⁴³ However, Bertrand is no more honest in his intentions according to his own introduction. It becomes clear that Bertrand's concern is with destroying Williams's reputation, both her personal and literary character rather than mounting a refutation of the text in itself:

This woman, in her preface, speaks of moderation and impartiality, and effects to condemn the severity of the sentence passed on Louis XVI, while in the very first pages she betrays her grand object to be to prove that he merited the sentence. She pretends to shed tears for his death, and yet delves to the bottom of his grave to spit upon him that venom which her lips and pen distil.³⁴⁴

Pretence is abhorrent, but nothing is more abhorrent than a treacherous woman. The *belle-infidèle* here even transforms into a venom spitting animal, with overtones of the oldest betrayal, Eve's susceptibility to the biblical snake, resounding in the damnation of the potential fatal female. Echoes, once again, of Miltonic female criminality abound.

The picture of Williams as temptress/traitor is further coloured with an extraordinary flight of presumptive rhetoric. Bertrand claims that:

There is no person in England who does not grieve, no person in France who does not blush, for having been betrayed into a participation of the enthusiasm excited at the commencement of the revolution: the calamities and numberless crimes which marked its way have long since rendered it as execrable to the French as to every other nation; and to complete its ignominy, there exists but one panegyrist of it, and that panegyrist is Helen Maria Williams!³⁴⁵

Williams is the sermoniser of the evil word of revolution and it is her creed which affects every single person in England and in France. In spite of himself, Bertrand affords Williams a great deal of power, a contradictory and self-defeating conundrum with which Robespierre, Napoleon and many of Williams's British critics found themselves bound. The power of this

³⁴³ The following chapter, concerning Williams's prefaces, discusses the idea of duplicitous statements of purpose using the neologism, *Skopos-aequivocus*, or equivocal-purpose.

³⁴⁴ Bertrand de Moleville, p. 2.

³⁴⁵ Bertrand de Moleville, p. 3.

malignant *femme-fatale* is reinscribed with Bertrand attributing Williams's motivation to jealousy, a simple notion, but one associated with feminine characteristics, not with the higher drives of those more suited to politics, men. Bertrand rails that:

Inflamed by this jealousy, Miss Williams blushes, cabals, beats about the bush, and at length, by chance or by means she does not think proper to reveal, finds the manuscript of the collection of Louis XVIth's letters. She contrives, heaven knows how! to make herself mistress of it, and immediately condemns it to the public torture of a translation and commentary inflicted by her own pen.³⁴⁶

The insinuation of improper means by which Williams acquired the manuscript sits well alongside the negative gender-metaphorics of the depiction of her as mistress to the text. Sexual liberation and moral impropriety are easily appointed labels with which to defame a woman writer, but take on further resonance in relation to translation. Loyalty and promiscuity are again attendant on Williams as, not only, a woman, but as a translator. Bertrand was, he claims, compelled to address *The Correspondence* by a letter from a friend, having initially had 'not the slightest curiosity to look at it.'³⁴⁷ Having done so, however, Bertrand was subject to a revelation akin to that of Williams's consistent critics: 'In consequence of this letter, I read with disgust as well as indignation, not only the last work published by Miss Williams, but her former ones on the revolution.'³⁴⁸ Again, no small degree of power is afforded Williams, whom Bertrand admits to having the capacity to provoke such extreme responses. Despite the stated dismissal of anything she may have produced as a mere trifle (his lack of even the slightest curiosity), Bertrand is greatly affected by the work of this woman: her very gender is the centrality which brings forth violently adverse reactions.

³⁴⁶ Bertrand de Moleville, p. 5.

³⁴⁷ Bertrand de Moleville, p. 5.

³⁴⁸ Bertrand, p. 6.

Just as suspicious of Williams's capacity to deceive is *Candidus*, writing in *The Sentinel* on her 'stiff, affected preface.' *Candidus* questions, 'with what different feelings has *she* made this selection!' calling into doubt, yet accepting, Williams's agency in the process.³⁴⁹ There is a recognition of the power of the translator, here, as well as Williams's mediatory position in the transaction. *Candidus* damns Williams with invective equal to that of Bertrand, claiming that 'Miss Williams (covering the hideous features of her soul with the mark of philosophical candour) appears triumphantly to believe, that her observations upon each letter will be able to confound or mislead the reader's judgement.---She is mistaken.'³⁵⁰ Such aggressive and figurative language is striking in its enmity, with Williams's very soul described as perverted and malformed, and echoes the critique from *The British Critic*, which ends with a final lunge to Williams's heart. In fact, it is both a feint and a direct thrust:

We have said nothing of the Gallicisms and inaccuracies which deform her translation: but, as the lady is now become entirely frenchified, this might reasonably be expected.³⁵¹

The translation is a deformity, a bastardisation of a recondite truth which Williams undertakes with the aforementioned, 'stupid perversity.' The parallel is faintly legible that Williams is herself deformed. She has become perverted and misshapen by French revolutionary politics into, according to *Candidus*, a grotesque chimera bent on deceiving her innocent readers.

In describing Williams as a deformity, a bastard, a distortion of true forms, her critics add weight to the conceptualisation of Williams as the liminal figure of uncertain definition. In the same way, *The Correspondence* can be thus described. At the same time, the work is and is not a translation. It is, of course, a translation *per se*, in the sense that Williams certainly

³⁴⁹ *Candidus*, July 1804, p. 11.

³⁵⁰ *Candidus*, July 1804, p. 11.

³⁵¹ *The British Critic*, p. 431.

translated from source text(s), but the question as to origination and authenticity widens the analytic field. We can say that, on one level, the work is a pseudotranslation (whether or not Williams was conscious of the fact) as the letters seem to have been claimed as Louis XVI's fraudulently. However, as the letters, though fake, certainly existed in actuality the translation is not a pseudotranslation, as Williams translated that which she thought to be real. She made no dissembling claims as to having produced a work based in a fictitious original (of which she was aware, anyhow). The letters both existed, and did not exist as the letters of the king. The publication had a defined *skopos*, or purpose according to Williams's preface, but the supposed *skopos* of the originators was untrue and her preface shows the signs of an equivocal purpose on her part. With a defined *skopos*, however, the *Correspondence* cannot be classed as pseudotranslation as the theory of *skopos* entirely rejects the concept. But, again, the work *is* a pseudotranslation in that it is a translation, but a translation without a source text, namely the actual letters of the king of France. Hence the title of this chapter. The case of this work is a strange one, indeed.

Whether Williams knew it or not, the letters have no basis in the truth she wished to examine and expose. But, again, they are based in the truth of an actual set of letters produced by Babié. Furthermore, the letters become a pseudotranslation if Mackintosh's conjecture as to Stone having provided the analysis and written the observations is brought to bear. Williams becomes, here, the mediator of a complex set of relationships. Stone's interpretation of a false text with Williams's interpretation of that interpretation plus the linguistic rendering of a text which exists but does not exist at the same time. We might place *The Correspondence* alongside Macpherson's *Ossian* as representative of a subgenre of Romantic pseudotranslation as it contains the paradoxical relationships between non-original originals which characterise the subgenre. Certainly the idea of originating genius is brought to bear in the work and we might therefore describe the *Correspondence* as a very Romantic

translation. The idea of originating genius exists in (Romantic) paradox, here, in Williams's insistence on bringing the reader towards the author: the king of France, if we accept his authorship or, obversely, revolutionary politics, if we dismiss the idea of Louis's authorship. She performs her own kind of Venuti's violence upon the king in this act of domestication and according to *Skopos* theory, the dethroning of the source text, or original. Williams, in this work, does both. She dethrones the king as the original French political paradigm and carries out his literary execution throughout the text, but also through the simple domestication of his name.

In a further echo of the complexities as to the nature of truth in regard to this work, Williams states in her commentary on a letter of 7 September 1789 to the Comte d'Artois, that 'the king, at this period was in the habit of being deceived and of deceiving himself.'³⁵² It is a fitting commentary that the king's behaviour, so pityingly described, obtains exactly to Williams, in that she was deceived by the editors and maintained a self-deception. We can perhaps, suggest that this self-deception was somehow, perhaps subconsciously, undertaken by Williams as a means of adopting a characterisation with which to retell, reinvent, to (re)translate a further dimension of supporting commentary, an appended revolutionary narrative perhaps. That is to say, the theatricality of the *mise-en-scene* created, with its solitary figure of the king is distanced from a more objective, perhaps clinical, documentary approach. It is here, that we can finally suggest that it does not matter if the letters were *real*, from whom they originated, and whether or not Williams knew there was something amiss (I suspect that she suspected, otherwise why be at such pains to stress the authenticity of her source. Once again, the lady doth protest too much.). It does not matter, in the same way that the veracity of Ossian did not matter. Ossian provided the Romantic writer with the means to tell a contemporary story, thus *The Correspondence* constitutes the *real* basis for Williams

³⁵² Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 223.

translation in an actual, solid sense (after all, the letters existed, fake or not) and the origination of her creative translation in the commentary and observations. The work is a pseudotranslation, in the finest tradition, if we can suggest such a lineage. It is a translation which has no original, the letters were fake, but the non-original provides Williams with the means of, perhaps unknowingly, (re)producing an (un)truthful narrative. *The Correspondence* occupies a singular, suitably liminal, space in Williams's translational oeuvre. The dualities concerning truth, origination and subterfuge and the layering and interconnection of multifarious dimensions and relationships makes the work a unique and fascinating study. The next chapter discusses the nature of truth as applicable to the stated and non-stated purpose(s) of translation as viewed and described by Williams in an analysis of her prefaces.

Chapter 5

Prefaces and Purpose(s): *Skopos-Aequivocus* and Williams as revolutionary *theoros*

Hugo's 'Preface' to *Cromwell*, 1827, provides the manifesto to French Romanticism, in its insistence on the interaction between antonymic binaries: the constant interplay of light and dark. Chateaubriand published his own manifesto for translation in his edition of his *Paradis Perdu*, (*Paradise Lost*) of 1835. The opening 'Remarques', 'Remarks' (Fr.), a preface in another guise, to his monumental translation offer several denials and admissions which seem to circle the inevitable paradox of literary untranslatability and certainly speak to the singularity of *Paradise Lost*, but also attest to the translation as an object of creation rather than retransmission. Chateaubriand's *à la vitre* translation strategy, by which he meant a transparent overlaying (imagine a pencil inscription of a text using tracing paper), was the means by which he proposed bringing about a revolution in translation, maintaining the foreignness of English (the Romantic movement of reader to author) by offering an utterly faithful transcription. But, Chateaubriand's version of the epic is laid out in prose.³⁵³ The translation is excellent, but the structure is different. How can this, then, be called a perfect translation? What of the shapes, the sounds, the rhythms of Milton's poetry? It is clear that, even with the fine intentions of creating a seamless matching of the texts and of concealing, even removing the trace of the translator, the creative aspect of the process is unavoidable. This chapter discusses the configuration of the translator's agency as fundamental to Williams's Romantic mind and, in particular, of the idea of visibility and purpose.

Chateaubriand's model, Milton, provided his own commentary in prefatory remarks to his translation of Horace's *Odes*, prefacing the work with the words "rendered almost word for

³⁵³ See Chateaubriand, *Le Paradis Perdu de Milton. Traduction nouvelle*. 2 vols (Paris: Gosselin, 1836) (Google Advanced Books) https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-nhMAAAAcAAJandprintsec=frontcoverandsource=gbg_summary_randcad=0#v=onepageandqandf=false [Accessed 21/12/15].

word without rhyme according to the Latin measure, as near as the language will permit.””³⁵⁴

Milton self-ascribes the persona of the favoured being, one with the capabilities of understanding all levels of linguistic freedom and constraint. There is a half-denial/half-admission of choice and agency in the (re)creative act. Chateaubriand makes similar claims, but goes further in asserting the absolute loyalty to an existing paradigm, a fitting declaration of alliance for one with Chateaubriand’s monarchist partisanship. By proposing a revolution in translation, he is somehow proposing a return, a movement revolving back over into pre-revolutionary loyalty to authority. With no small degree of modesty, Chateaubriand begins:

Me serait-il permis d’espérer que si mon essai n’est pas trop malheureux, il pourra amener quelque jour une revolution dans la manière de traduire? Du temps d’Ablancourt les traductions s’appelaient de *belles infidèles*; depuis ce temps-là on a vu beaucoup d’infidèles qui n’étaient pas toujours belles.

May I be permitted to hope that, if my attempt is not too miserable, it could one day bring about a revolution in the way of translating. From the time of d’Ablancourt translations have been called *belles-infidèles*: since this time we have seen many unfaithfuls which were not always beautiful.³⁵⁵

A grand claim, considering that the idea of literal translation was not a new one. It was, perhaps, something of a novelty in France however, where centuries of European dominance had relied upon assimilative models of translation. The desire to bring about revolution through translation was a project already in action in the body of Williams, whose entire career revolves around the centrality of 1789. The choice of text and of its *original* author speaks to Williams’s choices; the great revolutionary, Milton, translated by Chateaubriand, hoping to revolutionize French literature with no less a work than an explanation of the ways of God. The intertextualities echo in Williams’s *Correspondence*, as we have seen, in which she reconfigures Miltonic influence. This translation, and others, comprising the ‘pre[c]ious

³⁵⁴ Cited in Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 74.

³⁵⁵ Chateaubriand, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.; my trans.

lifeblood', fuelled by the 'master spirit' of liberty towards a futurity of a world citizenry no less a grave a task than Milton's.³⁵⁶

Milton was, however, no apologist for his words. The trope had become the template *du jour* by the time of Chateaubriand's plea for his readers' indulgence and is repeated by Williams in each of her prefaces, striking the reader with the strange notes of self-effacement which ring somewhat false to contemporary ears. The trope, the *modesty topos*, has been used since antiquity, but was particularly in vogue in the Romantic period. According to Innes Keighren, Charles Withers and Bill Bell:

Prefatory declarations of modesty and reluctance in authorship are sufficiently commonplace in works of nineteenth-century travel writing that they risk being dismissed simply as 'highly conventionalized' defaults, rather than being acknowledged as crafted elements of rhetorical strategy.³⁵⁷

Williams's prefaces could be dismissed in the same way. However, acknowledgement is due, as indeed each piece of prefatory material is a skilfully crafted example of Williams's mastery of rhetorical strategy. By examining the paratexts, we can discover more of Williams's idea of purpose by examining those writings which, like her, reside in the neutral territory between source and translation, the preface. 'Prefaces', states Bassnett, 'provided by translators not only give readers information about the genesis of a translation, but also reveal the strategies they have adopted. The use of paratextual material such as prefaces or notes serves to highlight the agency of the translator.'³⁵⁸ Williams's prefaces are illuminating regarding those aspects mentioned by Bassnett and very much highlight her position as creative agent, gatekeeper and mediator.

³⁵⁶ John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in *John Milton: Selected Prose*, ed by C. A. Patrides (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 201

³⁵⁷ Innes M. Keighren, Charles W. J. Withers and Bill Bell, *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773-1859* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 102.

³⁵⁸ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 118.

Extrapolating on Julian Wolfrey's analysis, Williams may be the ideal representation of a paratextual entity, as the nexus of influence existing, at the same, in and between cultures, Wolfrey argues that:

Prefatory material, neither wholly of the book nor exactly outside the text, exists in a liminal or marginal relationship to what is considered the corpus of the text. In this strange position, the preface or introduction is nonetheless supposed to present or represent — never simply a beginning point the preface is supposed to bring back or to be mimetically faithful—the thoughts, ideas, arguments, which occur across the chapters of the text, as though these essays and extracts were either (a) insufficient in some manner, incapable of representing their own theses, or (b) reducible in some fashion to a neat, homogeneous, comprehensible and seemingly finite, definable range of thoughts or theories.³⁵⁹

In a sense, Williams personifies the notion of a paratext in a similar way to Mary Favret's view that the *Letters* 'mimic in their narrative structure the fate of the author.'³⁶⁰ The connections between life and work are so profoundly linked in Williams that the two become at times indistinguishable. In her position at the margins, in between, the geo-political edifices of France, pre-reformation Germany and England, and as resident in the liminal space between, not only cultures and languages, but also in the margins of a patriarchal English literary tradition, she was always outside, yet within, para-cultural, para-national, para-literal. An impossible task, a foolish undertaking, then, to attempt the neat homogeneity and representation of the range of thoughts and theories suggested by Wolfrey, a 'heterogeneous medley of voices.'³⁶¹ As a singularly courageous individual, in life and work, however Williams did not shy from the task, but was always careful to remind her readers in periodic reference to the judgement of futurity. Found mainly in the prefaces, but also in other paratextual fragments, Williams repeats her caveat that the time was still to come when her objective and trustworthy communication of the totality of her experience of 1789 and

³⁵⁹ Jeffrey Wolfrey, ed., *The Derrida Reader* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1998), P. 4.

³⁶⁰ Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 55.

³⁶¹ Favret, p. 94.

after would be judged by posterity. In this sense, her entire oeuvre, after the pre-émigrée poetic career, becomes prefatory material for the grand judgement to be passed upon the Revolution by history.

Williams's strategy was to employ the *modesty topos* to circumvent some of the criticism levelled against her, but also to set up, what Favret calls in relation to the *Letters*, a 'formal disorientation in her work', a degree of alienation very much in line with Romantic translation theory.³⁶² By wrong-footing her reader, Williams is able to suggest the possibility of alterity as notions of subjective truth are always oscillating. Whilst it is difficult to ascribe Williams a definitive theoretical model of translation, we can derive a picture of the heterogeneity of influence from the strategic writings of the prefaces. Jenny Williams argues that:

[A]s all human activity is based on certain assumptions (or theories), translators have certain assumptions about the act of translating whether they are aware of them or not. The decisions taken by a translator over the course of a translation job – about register, terminology or layout, for example – are taken on the basis of theoretical considerations.³⁶³

Williams follows Chesterman, who argues that 'a translator must have a theory of translation: to translate without a theory is to translate blind.'³⁶⁴ Again, it would be unwise to suggest that Williams observed a strict theoretic paradigm in each of her translations, but the experimentation with form and process in her application of European translation thought means that in many cases she was indeed following theoretical lines, consciously or not. She is keen to bring the English closer to the French example of liberty and always applied revolutionary theory as she ascertained it. As such, we can say that she was led by her experience. Despite the blindness attributed to her by *Candidus* in the previous chapter, her

³⁶² Favret, p. 94.

³⁶³ Jenny Williams, *Theories of Translation* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2012), p. 13.

³⁶⁴ Chesterman, p. 2

eyes were, in fact, always open. Her desire was to open the eyes and thereby the minds of her readers to the possibilities of alien theoretic, political and cultural otherness.

The term, *theory*, derives from the Classical Greek, *theoros*, a person, according to Chesterman, ‘specifically designated to go and consult an oracle.’³⁶⁵ The same term, Chesterman notes, ‘was also used of someone who was sent to attend a festival in some official capacity.’³⁶⁶ Whilst Williams had not attended the *Fête de la Fédération* in any official function, the term lends itself to Williams, here, particularly in light of the potentialities of the term as ““spectator”, or “one who travels to see” people and places.’³⁶⁷ The suitability of the epithet is further cemented with Chesterman’s assertion that, ‘the *theoros* [...] was interested in truth, knowledge, but also in pleasure. The word contains a sense of rational judgement [...], but the core meaning is simply someone who sees, who sees with a purpose.’³⁶⁸ Seeing with a purpose was Williams’s *raison d’être* and the translation of the viewed event became, following 1791, her life’s work. As well as being considered a pre-eminent historian, she was *the* revolutionary *theoros*, the embodiment of theory.

Furthermore, as Chesterman explains, the verb *theorein* ‘to see, gaze upon’ marks a distinction between the idea of simply seeing [...] [T]he emphasis here is on the ‘function of seeing rather than the seeing itself.’³⁶⁹ The verb also meant ‘to be a spectator’, ‘i.e. a spectator of something’ stressing the ‘conscious, deliberate activity of seeing rather than some kind of purely passive perception.’³⁷⁰ From this came the noun *theoria*, ‘theory’ which contained both the sense of viewing and also inward ‘contemplation, speculation.’³⁷¹

Describing a story from Herodotus about Solon, who had left home on a long voyage with the

³⁶⁵ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁶⁶ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁶⁷ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁶⁸ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁶⁹ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁷⁰ Chesterman, p. 1.

³⁷¹ Chesterman, p.2.

intention of seeing the world, Chesterman says that, ‘the original Greek literally states that he went out into the world “for the sake of *theoria*” – i.e. in order to see and contemplate.’³⁷²

Thus, Williams becomes the Revolutionary *theoros*, going out into the world for the sake of her *theoria* on her terms. The key notion here is that Williams was travelling in order to see, but furthermore in order to translate the sensory and psychological experience. This was her purpose. Williams, in translation, is, herself, *theory*, in that she embodies the classical *theoros*. Her theory of translation can be aligned with Chesterman’s argument that ‘a translation is [...] a theory: the translator’s theory, posed as a tentative solution to the initial question of how to translate the source text. [...] In accordance with the etymology of the word, too, the translator’s theory thus represents a *view* of the source text, the translator’s view.’³⁷³ Williams’s theoretical approach was typically amorphous, but we can say that, in general, her theory was that which she had experienced required translation as a fundamental humanitarian necessity.

Pym sees the translator as being engaged in theorizing all of the time when engaged in translation. In this view, the very act of translating contains within its function the theorizing of the process, overtly or otherwise. Pym makes a distinction between “this private, internal theorizing” and “public theory”.³⁷⁴ If taken as an instance of self-translation, the final work, the *Souvenirs* and more broadly Williams herself (as engaged in a project of self-translation through trans-national assimilation), here, represent facets of the embodiment of her own theoretical paradigm. Her agency created the mode between which the internalized experience of France and the public expression was communicated.

The corpus of prefaces, taken as a body of interconnected paratexts, provides the most fruitful field of analysis for Williams’s theory of purpose, as this is where, as Jenny Williams states,

³⁷² Chesterman, p. 2

³⁷³ Chesterman, p. 118

³⁷⁴ Cited in Williams, *Theories of Translation*, p. 14.

‘translators become theorists when they comment on their work in paratexts such as translator’s notes and prefaces or in correspondence with publishers or friends.’³⁷⁵ Robinson maintains a distinction between this corpus and what he terms ‘formal translation theory’.³⁷⁶ This zone of intra-dimensional material is where we situate Williams as a theorist, as she produced no writings specifically concerning what we might definitively term *translation theory*, but in her prefaces she reveals her reasoning and her sense of purpose and the strange ways in which she disguises and obscures them.

It is always important for Williams that theory be put in to practice, words should be tested. As with so much of Williams’s literary experimentation, this desire finds its source of influence at the 1790 *Fête de la Fédération*. In Letter VI of the *Letters Written from France 1790*, she offers the following:

Those men now before my eyes are the men who engross the attention, the astonishment of Europe; for the issue of whose decrees surrounding nations wait in suspense, and whose fame has already extended through every civilized region of the globe: the men whose magnanimity invested them with power to destroy the old constitution, and whose wisdom is erecting the new, on a principle of perfection which has hitherto been thought chimerical, and has only served to adorn the page of the philosopher; but which they believe may be reduced to practice, and have therefore the courage to attempt.³⁷⁷

Williams’s practice is to transmit the revolution to England. The translation is theory in action with Williams as the liminal personification of myriad aspects of influence coalesced into her dynamic centrality. There is always a purpose (sometimes there are multiple purposes), to Williams’s work. In the main, we can claim a consistent desire for regeneration towards mutuality of understanding. This is true of her *Letters*, but it is in translation where she finds the liberty to express her experience of equivalence and change.

³⁷⁵ Jenny Williams, p. 14.

³⁷⁶ Robinson, p. xviii

³⁷⁷ Williams, ‘Letter VI’, *Letters in France 1790*, p. 82

Having already regenerated a somewhat *démodé* term from Translation Studies with which to describe Williams, the Nida-derived *dynamically-equivalent* (expanded, here, to suggest Williams as *dynamically-equivalent* Revolutionary *theoros*), I propose the reanimation of a further term with which to discuss her work, that of *Skopos*, the palingenesis of which provides a base from which to define Williams's attitude to translational purpose. If anything can be gleaned from Williams's prefaces, indeed her writings post-emigration as a corpus, it is that she wrote always with a keen sense, if sometimes paradoxical, even confused, but nonetheless definite purpose. Katherina Weiss and Hans Vermeer's theory of translational purpose, *Skopostheorie*, provides a useful paradigm in which to frame the discussion.³⁷⁸

One of the most striking aspects of Williams's prefaces is a ubiquitous and very Romantic duality, the constant oscillation between her stated purpose, or *skopos*, and that which lies beneath. An example is the faux-modesty of the prefaces to *Paul and Virginia* and *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, in which Williams's deference to her English readership and her celebration of their superiority to other European literary cultures actually seems to conceal an admiration for, in particular, French culture and especially politics and philosophy. '[I]t is clear', writes Gayatri Spivak, in the Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, 'that, as it is commonly understood, the preface harbours a lie.'³⁷⁹ This being the case, I propose a new term with which to discuss Williams and the notion of purpose. Invoking Frederick Burwick's notion of translation as a 'cross-pollination which brings forth the richer bloom', I suggest the term, *Skopos-Aequivocus*, a fusion of the Greek noun, *Skopos*, or purpose, and the Latin modifier, *Aequivocus*, or equivocal, as a new term with which to define a dual-purpose mode of theoretical definition of paratextual theory.³⁸⁰ In the interaction between the Greek and Latin, the term captures the vibrant relationship of forces alive in Williams's translation

³⁷⁸ As noted elsewhere, *Skopos* is Greek for purpose.

³⁷⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface' in *Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology* trans. by Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. x.

³⁸⁰ Burwick, p.1435.

and, in particular, the prefaces. The richer bloom here is the agglomeration of explicit and implicit aspects of Williams's double-edged attitude to the function and purpose of her work in translation and further to her identity as mediator and self-translator.

In a paper from 1989, translated by Andrew Chesterman, which he described as a 'short sketch of my *skopos* theory', Vermeer defines the term as follows:

Any form of translational action, including therefore translation itself, may be conceived as an action, as the name implies. Any action has an aim, a purpose. [...] The word *skopos*, then, is a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation.³⁸¹

The theory was a product-oriented approach and was centred on non-literal translation, as it largely concerned the agreement of aims between client and translator. As such, it does not fit the literary model *per se*, as applicable to a conception of Williams's translations. *Skopos*, coming out of theories of translatorial action, largely pertained to a more functional model, conditional on translations in more prosaic fields of linguistic transfer, such as scientific or technical documentation for which there may be a specific and measurable contractual client-translator agreement. Jeremy Munday summarises the criticisms of *skopos* theory in this regards, arguing that, '[w]hat purports to be a "general" theory is in fact only valid for non-literary texts. Literary texts are considered either to have no specific purpose and/or to be far more complex stylistically.'³⁸² Indeed, but to paraphrase Popper, a theory that explains everything explains nothing and I posit the word *skopos* as a useful term, reconfigured for the purpose, or *skopos*, of this thesis. Williams's approach to translation is often extremely audacious. She recrafts, appending extraneous material to her target text, omitting sections from the source text in equal measure, showing further associative practice with *skopos* theory. To cite Vermeer: 'One practical consequence of the *skopos* theory is a new concept of

³⁸¹ Hans J. Vermeer, 'Skopos and Commission in Translational Action', trans. Andrew Chesterman, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd Ed, ed Lawrence Venuti (NY; Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p. 227.

³⁸² Munday, p. 81

the status of the source text for a translation.’³⁸³ This is particularly true when we ascribe the notion of ‘dethroning the source’ to the translation of *The Correspondence*, discussed in the previous chapter.

‘Translating is doing something’, states Vermeer and the translator, Williams, was indeed always actively engaged in a cultural and textual interaction which produced reconfigured artefacts made ready for reception in alternative cultures to that in which they had already been seen.³⁸⁴ This last sentence is true, of course for all translations, but in the case of Williams, the degree of play to which she subjects her source material and the resulting richness of her translatorial corpus means definite credence can be given to Vermeer’s notion of dethroning the source. Vermeer claims that ‘It is not to be expected that merely “trans-coding” a source text, merely “transposing” it into another language, will result in a serviceable *translatum*.’³⁸⁵ Obvious disagreement will arise as to what constitutes a ‘serviceable’ text in literary terms, but it remains clear that Williams translated with a purpose and that a serviceable text represented one which carried often unpopular ideas and cultural difference towards a reception in England.

The notion of *skopos* is, then, to be used here as a component of the neologism, *skopos-aequivocus*, her own rendering of the *modesty topos* as rhetorical trope as applicable to the dual nature of self-assessment and purpose in Williams’s prefaces. We could consider her *client* or, rather, *clients* as being always the originating principles of the 1789 Revolution and the mediation of European thought towards universalism. For Bassnett, ‘Vermeer’s hypothesis is that the aim of the translation justifies the strategies employed.’³⁸⁶ Thus we can say that Williams’s aim, her *skopos-verum*, or true purpose, to coin another phrase, was to

³⁸³ Vermeer, in Venuti, ed., p. 228.

³⁸⁴ Vermeer, in Venuti, ed., p. 228

³⁸⁵ Vermeer, in Venuti, ed., p.228

³⁸⁶ Bassnett, *Translation* p. 6

provide access to the shades of light and dark, most fittingly claimed by Hugo in the preface to *Cromwell* as the purpose of Romantic writing as whole. As such, her *fidèle-libre* strategy of alternate foreignisation and domestication fitted her life-purpose of mediation at a more abstract level and, at the level of the text itself, fitted her purpose of bringing the reader towards the source text, à la Schleiermacher. According to Jenny Williams, ‘Vermeer has [...] pointed out that is impossible to be loyal to all the participants in any translation job.’³⁸⁷ Williams found it impossible to spread her loyalties, if we can indeed suggest such conceptions of national loyalty. Her loyalties to England, France, to her gendered expectations, to her sources were stretched and reconfigured continuously. She was an early admirer of Bonaparte, for example, but later withdrew her loyalties as his policies became more authoritarian. Loyalty to source texts was always questionable. It is more appropriate to reassert her nature as subversive, refusing even those gender-bound notions of fealty which have so characterised the language of translation.

Having extensively prefaced the discussion to this examination of prefaces, we can now turn to the extraction of Williams’s purpose(s) by first looking at the introduction to the translation from France: *Paul and Virginia*. As suggested elsewhere, in their experimentation and dynamism *Paul and Virginia* (1796) and *The Leper of the City of Aoste* (1817) represent complementary works, companion pieces, not least because they are the most strictly literary of her Parisian translations. The notion of companionship also pertains to the prefaces to the two works. The respective chapters concerning each work address the prefaces at length. The purpose here will be to concentrate on those aspects of each work which demonstrate Williams’s *skopos-aequivocus*, thereby drawing out her ideas concerning theory and purpose. As in the overall structure of this thesis, the analysis will be largely diachronic in nature. Bassnett argues, however, that, ‘attempts to locate stages of cultural development within

³⁸⁷ Jenny Williams, p. 54.

strict temporal boundaries contradict [cultural dynamism].'³⁸⁸ In light of the suggestion as to Williams's translational and cultural dynamism, the analysis will move between texts and their temporal positions, suggesting a more fluid conception of the relationships between those texts.

Williams's initial *skopos* in *Paul and Virginia* is given as providing her some relief from the daily horrors of Parisian life under Robespierre's authority, a theme which reoccurs in her works. In *Paul and Virginia* she speaks of how, 'during that gloomy epocha it was difficult to find occupations which might cheat the days of calamity of their weary length.'³⁸⁹ The act of translating affords her the 'most soothing relief' from the confused and confusing milieu in which she finds herself.³⁹⁰ Not only does the translation provide Williams with a means of escape, but her readership is afforded travel to realms of discovery away from their own contemporary sorrows. This is a trope repeated in *The Leper of the City of Aoste* where the translation can provide relief to those 'sickened of the commotions of states, and almost despairing of mankind in the midst of their warring crimes and passions.'³⁹¹ She had written of the translation process in a similar style in the preface to the *Correspondence*, in which she describes the difficulty of production, making great claims as to her role of dispassionate recorder. She begins the preface with the following:

Amidst the struggles of contending parties, and the fury of hostile passions, to which great public events give birth, there is no task more difficult than to observe with calmness, and appreciate with impartiality, the actors in those memorable scenes.³⁹²

Never failing to position herself at the centre of the action, Williams can stake her claim on the liminal space of the middle ground. She can observe and report from the vantage point,

³⁸⁸ Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 47.

³⁸⁹ Williams, *P & V*, p. iii.

³⁹⁰ Williams, *P & V*, p. iii.

³⁹¹ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. vii.

³⁹² Williams, *Correspondence*, p. v.

thereby assuring her readers of her expertise and specialist knowledge. She resides at the eye of the storm, but is able to journey beyond and communicate a true report of that which she has experienced. Not only that, but through engagement with her translations, the reader may gain access to this liminal space beyond everyday comprehension, a strategy by which she can move her reader towards the realms of a universality of understanding.

Williams is careful not to boast of possessing too specialist an understanding, of course. The section of *Paul and Virginia* which reveals most the artful, perhaps disingenuous explication (or least the cognitive dissonance of a kind of Orwellian *doublethink*, to invoke Blair once again) practically hums with the faux-modesty characteristic of much in Williams's self-analysis. She demurs that, 'with respect to the translation, I can only hope to deserve the humble merit of not having deformed the original.'³⁹³ The sincerity with which she entreaties the reader is strange, given that her readership presumably did not possess the linguistic capabilities with which to read both source text and target and thereby perform the comparative analysis from which to judge. Also striking is the denial of deformation as (re)formation and reanimation are fundamental aspects of her process. The sonnets, the superimposition of which she passes over in the preface's preceding paragraph ('I also composed a few sonnets adapted to the peculiar productions of that part of the globe, which are interspersed in the work', she writes) may represent the kind of deformation at which conservative literary tastes may have balked.³⁹⁴ As well as the political and cultural intentions, there is something of the creative need for admiration, here, at least the desire for the reception of her creations. Why would one trouble, otherwise, to append one's own poetry if it were not intended for an appreciative audience? There is, of course, Williams's affinity for the literature of sensibility to be considered. The poems, after all, inject an emotional dimension into the text overall. The language of mutual-apprehended feeling is

³⁹³ Williams, *P & V*, p. viii.

³⁹⁴ Williams, *P & V*, p. vii.

necessarily interposed to strengthen the text's purpose: that of transmission of Rousseau-influenced French thought.

She also expresses her concern with the confiscation by the Paris authorities of some of the poems intended for inclusion. 'Some indeed,' Williams mourns, 'are lost, as well as part of the translation, which I have since supplied; having been sent to the Municipality of Paris, in order to be examined as English papers; where they still remain, mingled with revolutionary placards, motions, and harangues; and are not likely to be restored to my possession.'³⁹⁵

There is no need to report these lost poems as they do not appear in the text. The expression of their loss suggests Williams's view as to the value of her own work as commensurate to the original, perhaps it is of even more value. Of course, having produced them, they would assuredly be personally significant, but the concern is telling as it highlights her sense of validation in her self-imposition of the revolutionary narrative, in general. The connection can be expanded to include the idea of the attribution of her writing with political writing more broadly, in her announcement as to the revolutionary colours and political importance of her own work in company with other important and suspicious political texts seized as dangerous works. The suggestion is subtle, but nonetheless a trace is discernible, that her work is firstly political and, moreover, progressive and even dangerously subversive.

Despite her denial, Williams admits to mal(re)formation in having 'taken one liberty with [her] author, which,' she accedes, 'it is fit I should acknowledge; that of omitting several pages of general observations, which however excellent in themselves, would be passed over with impatience by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative.'³⁹⁶

Gracious to a fault, it is once, of course, disingenuous of Williams to admit to this 'one' liberty. As we have seen in a preceding chapter, '*Paul and Virginia*', she has taken many

³⁹⁵ Williams, *P & V*, p. vii.

³⁹⁶ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

liberties taken with this translation. Williams's assumed position of omnipotence is brought to the fore here, in regard to her self-imposition of arbiter of national tastes. She is the *theoros*-translator, the mediator as creator, communicator, gatekeeper and judge. This is where Williams's *skopos-aequivocus* becomes most obvious. 'In this respect' she claims, 'the two nations seem to change characters', offering an explanation of the diverging national characteristics of her readership.³⁹⁷ The Englishman is defined as 'serious and reflecting', requiring 'in novel writing, as well as in the theatre, a rapid succession of incidents [...] without suffering the author to appear himself.'³⁹⁸ The 'gay and restless' Frenchman, meanwhile, is described as preferring to 'listen attentively to long philosophical reflections, while the catastrophe of the drama hangs in suspense.'³⁹⁹ The trick is subtly, yet brilliantly, played. By reassuring the English reader of his merited pride in not suffering the author's (read 'translator's) visibility in the text, Williams is able to take the spotlight from herself and move into the shadows. Her presence is obvious throughout the entire work, but with this feint she manages to elude capture and can therefore slip through the text undetected.

There is also a strange dichotomy at work here, a (Romantic) paradox attendant on the dualities at play in Williams's oeuvre of liminality. Leaving aside the impossibility of defining a general readership according to nationally determined characteristics, if, as Williams claims, the English are serious and reflecting surely they would be capable of digesting the philosophical digressions so easily received by the French, for whom the noun *restless* lends itself (usefully to Williams, here) to associations of impatience, excitability and even, perhaps especially, childishness. The false notes of praise make something of a cacophony here. Williams, as she recorded many times in her publications from France, had nothing but admiration for the French. In fact, the paragraph seems to imply the inversion of

³⁹⁷ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

³⁹⁸ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

³⁹⁹ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

the characteristics she attributes explicitly to the French as applicable to the English readership. After all the Englishman, according to Williams, requires ‘a rapid succession of incidents, much bustle and stage effect,’ and nothing which would, ‘stop the progress of the story.’⁴⁰⁰ These distinctions between the understandings of national tongues, language acquisition and linguistic hierarchies are double-edged if we read the affection and regard with which she speaks of France and of the French language and culture in other works of reportage. The piece is chicanery: she damns with faint praise, in fact high praise, hoping once again to deceive her reader into missing an aspect of her operation which may preclude engagement.

The preface to *The Leper of the City of Aoste* (1817) is replete with similar expressions concerning acquisition of a domestic language, of the mother tongue and of the development and usage according to attributes of national identity. As we might expect from a poet of sensibility, she explains that having been ‘so affected’ by the original she desires giving it an ‘English dress’, her decision deriving from the recognition that whilst ‘long habit may render a foreign tongue as familiar as our own, we love best to weep over sorrows recorded in that language in which our earliest emotions were felt.’⁴⁰¹ Has Williams, then, undertaken this translation for herself, in order that she might reread the text in English, thereby heightening the possibilities of her sympathetic response? It is interesting that sensibility translates in French as sensitivity/sensibility. The attendant French adjective, *sensible* can be translated as a subtly nuanced version of the English sensitive and can be used pejoratively as in English to suggest over-sensitivity. For example, the phrase, ‘Ô! Que vous êtes sensible!’ becomes ‘Oh! But you’re so/too sensitive!’ in the vernacular. In English, the word has come to describe Williams’s characteristics of the ‘serious, reflecting Englishman’, whilst in French to be sensible is to be possessed of a certain sensitivity. Perhaps, however, Williams wishes to

⁴⁰⁰ Williams, *P & V*, p. ix.

⁴⁰¹ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, pp. v-vi.

attribute this sensibility (certainly to herself) but also to her readership. Giving the work an English dress enables Anglophones indeed to weep over the sorrows therein.

In fact, once again, despite Williams's claims as to the *skopos-verum* of this work, the *skopos-aequivocus* comprises manifold purposes, the most important being her willingness, indeed intention to communicate a problematic text, in terms of potential reception, and to experiment with translational praxis based largely in a distillation of contemporary German thought. In a further note of apology, she offers the 'slight performance by the Translator with great deference to the English reader.'⁴⁰² Later she refers to the work as 'this little production.'⁴⁰³ Whilst the book may be slight in its physical dimensions, it is far from a little piece in terms of the dynamic conglomeration of socio-political, philosopho-lingual complexities of its content, as discussed at length in the following chapter. The work Williams offers as a trifle, a bagatelle, something to use in order to escape quotidian socio-political concerns is of far greater importance to her self-defined Romantic project. 'The great interests of the revolution have led almost every eloquent writer in this country to give to politics those powers of mind, which in calmer periods of human history would have been devoted to more soothing meditations.'⁴⁰⁴ It is doubtful, given her proclivity to political commentary and her engagement with Brissotin, later Girondin, factions that Williams held political thought and writing in such low regard. The work is, itself, political in its transmission of sensibility towards the fellow-feeling at the very heart of Williams's cherished originating revolutionist principles. 'When we chance to meet with a few pages remote from the Order of the Day (*sic.*)', she writes, 'we delight, perhaps too much in the new sensations which they excite. Sickened of the commotions of states, and almost despairing of mankind in the midst of their warring crimes and passions, we turn willingly

⁴⁰² Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. vi.

⁴⁰³ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. vii.

⁴⁰⁴ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. vi.

from the turbulence of public calamity to hear the complaint of the poor LEPER (*sic.*).’⁴⁰⁵

Williams never gives herself fully to abject despair. The ‘almost’ is, once again, an appropriate adjective to apply to Williams, in life and work. In the production as a whole the translation is always in a state of betweenness, the motion oscillates between fidelity and creativity, producing an exciting sensation of ‘almost, but not quite’. This is a development on the work in *Paul and Virginia*, a piece which itself brims with similarly exciting experimentation and was, Williams was keen to assert, a translation undertaken amidst a volatile milieu. The revisions and omissions of *Paul and Virginia* are rather larger in scale (as particular instances), perhaps, whilst by the time of *The Leper* Williams’s dynamism is at work on a sentence by sentence basis. In the intervening years, she had assimilated a great deal of German thought concerning the nature and practise of translation and had become a more linguistically dynamic translator, wanting always to promote the connections of sensibility, philosophy, and progressive politics she was engaged with through her relationships with thinkers in revolutionary Paris. ‘Almost’ is an important modifier for Williams. The preface to *The Correspondence* contains an incredibly impassioned elegy to the revolution, a ‘period in the annals of mankind [...] calculated to awaken solemn, rapt attention, to seize every faculty of the soul, to call forth every feeling excited by the sublime and the terrible, than the epocha of that revolution which, in its effects, will change the condition, and almost the destinies, of man.’⁴⁰⁶ Again, almost but not quite. Holding back, Williams betrays a nervousness as to final outcomes, her experiences under Robespierre and other influences corruptive of her cherished idealism having taught her a wariness which she cannot help but express.

She defines her purpose in this preface as providing commentary on the letters and the edition as a whole, once again asserting herself as dispassionate, objective *rapporteuse*. She soon

⁴⁰⁵ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, pp. vi-vii.

⁴⁰⁶ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I., pp. xxv-xxvi.

reveals her colours, however. The French editors, she charges, have produced the edition with the intention of mounting a defence of the executed king. However, ‘to defend the memory of Lewis the Sixteenth appears less the aim of his friends, than to calumniate the memory of those who have rendered themselves illustrious by reducing their country from the ignoble servitude under which it was oppressed.’⁴⁰⁷ The revolution, ‘this generous effort’, has been ‘stigmatised [...] as a “series of useless crimes, producing only useless disasters.”’⁴⁰⁸ It is ‘slated to have “caused the most enlightened nation of Europe to make a retrograde step towards barbarism,”’ and to have ““rendered indocile to the yoke the people whom the king’s birth had condemned him to govern.”’⁴⁰⁹ Williams has, by now, made an early admission that she is of an opinion contrary to admirers of the king. ‘Whatever disposition we may have to strew flowers over the tomb of the unfortunate,’ she states, ‘we may be allowed to doubt whether any generation [...] will raise Lewis the Sixteenth to the honours of an apotheosis.’⁴¹⁰

The ‘generous mind,’ she claims ‘naturally places itself on the side of the oppressed multitude.’⁴¹¹ Once again, Williams shows herself, yet veils her agency. The generality of *the* generous mind conceals her assertion as to her own benevolence of spirit. Williams must maintain the authority of the neutral commentator. The message is underscored with the assurance that, ‘we may, therefore, be permitted to consider ourselves as a sort of posterity with respect to him, and be allowed to be capable of judging him with the calm impartiality which, in the ordinary course of human affairs, is the birthright of succeeding generations.’⁴¹² Double-edged self-appraisal, here. Williams could hardly be described as impartial regarding revolutionary sympathies. She defines herself as merely the receptor, a vessel. She follows a

⁴⁰⁷ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁴⁰⁸ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I., xxiv.

⁴⁰⁹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xxiv.

⁴¹⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xi.

⁴¹¹ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xii.

⁴¹² Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. vi.

calling. She connects this destiny with truth, claiming that '[w]hatever may be the personal feelings or opinions of a writer with respect to political characters or events, he surely, when he presumes to seize the pen of history, cannot lose sight of the dignity of his occupation, or forget (to use the words of Johnson) "that he is charged with a certain portion of truth."'”⁴¹³

The choice of distinguishing herself as dignified truth-bearer is bold and with the force of such rhetoric Williams almost gets away with it. Until we note the subtle inclusion of the quotation and in particular the word, 'portion'. The hint, probably unintentional, once we have seen it, shows up the 'almost, but not quite' trope common to Williams. She will not tell the whole truth. She must, of course, deceive in order to manipulate regeneration and reception. As the last chapter discussed, it is unfortunate then that she should be at such great pains to establish herself as the mediator of an objective truth when in fact the work is based in an untruth. In this sense, her self-definition is apt as she becomes a purveyor of a portion of truth.

Regarding further, the *skopos* of this work, Williams performs an instance of translation, if unwittingly, based itself on a *skopos-aequivocus*. The forgery of the letters and the duplicitous intentions of the editors was later revealed as having had the equivocal purpose of damning the anti-royalist cause. She provides further evidence for the necessity of her work with the following:

The defence of Lewis the Sixteenth is therefore no longer the point in contest, or at least becomes only a point of secondary consideration. His friends have shifted the ground on which they might have remained secure, and, by enlarging their means of defence, have left themselves and the object of their idolatry open to attack. It is no longer the king they mean to defend; it is the revolution they are earnest to criminate. Let them not be displeased therefore, if, in the observations which have suggested themselves on reading these letters, they sometimes discover an attempt to defend that barbarism towards which the most enlightened country in Europe has made a retrograde step.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xii.

⁴¹⁴ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, pp. xxii-xxiii.

Her *skopos* is, then, as always, a defence of the revolution. The *skopos-aequivocus* works here on two levels. Firstly, Williams does not explicitly state her purpose as being the defence of the revolution, rather she admits that in her impartial mediation she is forced to provide commentary which reveals this truth. Something approaching an admission is offered in the following:

Considering the revolution as the most important event of modern history, everything that tends to throw any light on that momentous epocha has some portion of interest; and it is with this persuasion that I presume to offer the public the observations which accompany the subsequent letters.⁴¹⁵

The *modesty topos* is ever present as is the implied significance of the revolution, whilst the celebration of that ‘most important’ event is somewhat occluded by the reference to any evidence which *might* inform her commentary as having only a ‘portion of interest.’ She continues:

If I have not concealed my admiration of the great and exalted principles in favour of the human race which the revolution was destined to establish, I hope also, that in commenting on the character and conduct of Lewis the Sixteenth, I shall not be accused of insensibility or injustice, while I have sought nothing but truth. Some of the observations subjoined, trivial perhaps in themselves, may derive value from their connexion with the mighty event of the revolution, in the same manner as an obscure individual may be remembered, who carves his name upon an immortal monument, which mocks the destruction of time.⁴¹⁶

The opening of this section shows the dexterity with which Williams applies her rhetorical trickery. She manages to both apologise for, and to firmly inscribe her revolutionary principles by suggesting the errors in execution (not *managing* to conceal her admiration) and by juxtaposing them to her capacity of generosity when recording her attitudes to the king. Recall that it is a generous mind which leans naturally towards revolutionary ideals. It

⁴¹⁵ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xxvii.

⁴¹⁶ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, pp. xxiv-xxv.

follows, then, that the revolution is truth. The piece ends with another piece of expertly crafted deferral. Whilst making claims only for the continued existence of some of the observations, we can draw out the will for Williams to ensure, in language reminiscent of ‘Ozymandias’, the survival of her work and her name. A recurring theme, posterity is key to the preface to the Louis XVI letters. Time will tell, with the help of Williams and the temporally-altered and future-nuanced reception of Louis XVI. Williams will be the mediator, the time-traveller who will influence future attitudes. As she always reminds us, history would prove the judgement of the revolution, it were useless to present oneself as an entity of time-proof importance, rather she offers her commentary as contributory to potential for Revolutionary futurity. In this, I believe Williams was genuine in her sentiments and her claims to truth were in a sense, true.

In this chapter concerned with prefaces, the regeneration of texts and the futurity of authors and authorship, it seems appropriate to bring into the discourse perhaps the most famous of all paratextual preface texts, Walter Benjamin’s essay, ‘On the Task of the Translator’ (1923) as it is from here we draw the idea of a textual afterlife. The piece, the preface to his translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens* (1923), is one of the most widely read theoretic pieces in Translation Studies. Despite its fame, however the work has been brilliantly dismantled by David Bellos in the essay ‘Halting Walter’, who expertly analyses the texts and finally dismisses the essay as ‘Benjamin’s twelve paragraphs.’⁴¹⁷ Bellos rejects Benjamin’s idea of the textual afterlife and would, perhaps, argue that Benjamin’s essay has secured for itself something of an undeserved afterlife. However, the idea of the afterlife of a text was fundamental to Williams’s translation project. Whereas, for Benjamin, translation secured the existential continuance of the source text, for Williams the process was more complex. Not only did her translations secure the continued reception of (mediated) source

⁴¹⁷ See David Bellos, ‘Halting Walter’, in the *Cambridge Literary Review* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 207-201.

material, but part of her *skopos* was to ensure the afterlife of a corpus of revolutionary materials all contributing to the future judgement of the revolution. The afterlife could potentially bring about the advances, as she saw them, in human interaction through reinterpretation and further regeneration of ideas.

For Benjamin, according to Bassnett, ‘the translator has to bear the responsibility for the continued existence of the original but in another context.’⁴¹⁸ Williams was proud to bear the responsibility for the communication of the revolution into futurity. She was forced to bear the troublesome responsibility of the case of the Louis XVI letters, a career-halting situation, from which she took a long time to recover. However, it would have pleased her immensely to know that she bears the responsibility of the continued regeneration of revolutionary discourse, not only through her historical accounts, but by her continuous transmissions from the middle ground of her translations.

Williams travelled so that we may see, but with a mind to transmit a wider, shared experience. The preface to the largest work which she undertook in the genre, the translation of Alexander von Humboldt’s travel writings in South America contains the usual self-denial. ‘What sympathy’, she asks, ‘does the traveller excite, while he imprints that first step, that leads to civilisation and all its boundless blessings [...] and [...] obtains a victory that belongs to mankind.’⁴¹⁹ In an imitation of life, Williams retraces her own first steps into a world in which the civilising population was headed towards a great victory for all humanity. The revolutionary fervour by which she had been so affected was stoked by those actors engaged in a battle for civilisation, those ‘struggling with the savageness of the untamed wilderness’, whose feelings she must have shared during her initial moments and, indeed, her

⁴¹⁸ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 13.

⁴¹⁹ Williams, ‘Preface’, in *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent with Maps, Plans etc. Written in French by Alexander von Humboldt, and translated into English by Helen Maria Williams*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1814), Vol. I., p. viii.

residence in revolutionary Paris.⁴²⁰ She had managed to strike a path through the brutal hinterland of post-revolutionary Paris, finding in translation the relief from daily trials of life under the barbarity of Robespierre's authority, as she recorded in *Paul and Virginia*. Again, she reveals herself in autobiographical prose whilst maintaining the distance afforded by concentration on the third person, appearing and disappearing like a sprite in a forest. In this she retains the objective authorial voice whilst actually expressing the subjective self, the Schlegelian Romantic translation strategy informing her non-translational marginalia in the same way.

Defining her role in the translation process, she works continuously with the characteristics of duality and overlay. Humboldt is ostensibly the traveller and the writer here, therefore the bringer of the truths contained in the work, but it is Williams who travels further and mediates the communication, thereby becoming the privileged *theoros* in his stead. In order not to overexpose herself, she employs the *modesty topos*, once again, and offers a characteristic apology:

My scanty knowledge of the first principles of science seemed indeed to preclude the full comprehension of many of the subjects of which he treats; but a short experience convinced me, that what is clearly expressed may be clearly understood; and I shall perhaps be pardoned, if, from the novelty of the subject, neologisms sometimes occur.⁴²¹

Williams always took risks, choosing to translate difficult texts and, when translating them, to append, omit and experiment in a consistently courageous and dynamic manner. Again, despite the apology, her self-confidence announces itself. We may note the confidence with which she assumes the expertise with which to translate a work of science. She has learnt everything she needs to know very quickly and even allows herself the liberty of linguistic creation in a text which, by its nature, rests upon definitiveness and certainty. She approaches

⁴²⁰ Williams, *Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, p. viii.

⁴²¹ Williams, *Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, p. xi.

the text using her own model of interpretative retransmission in the same way as with any other literary exercise, be it poetry, novels or political letters.

This preface contains another appeal to readers, and critics, in what she interestingly designates as ‘my country’, for leniency. We may suspect a duplicitousness in the use of the possessive pronoun here. Did Williams continue to feel such a strong connection? Did she hold England in her heart, see it still as *her* country? Did she even feel such a monochromatic identity, after all she was of Scottish-Irish parentage? She would be naturalised as French in a few short years and, if anything, she expresses a brand of global citizenship which suggests dismissal of nationalistic affiliations. It is more likely that she felt a dualism, if not a dual-nationality, but would have been eager to reassert her Anglophilia in order to reassure a readership likely to be hostile to an offering from a translator who had denounced her birth-nation and mother tongue.

Long a stranger to my country, I have indeed no critical favour to expect; I mean that species of favour, which arises from personal acquaintance, and, perhaps even unknowing to the critic himself, softens the stern brow of reproof, and leads him unconsciously to be indulgent, when he only meant to be just. I have nothing to hope from such predilection. My literary patrons belonged to what Ossian calls “the days of other years.” Above all, the learned protector of my early pen, he, whom I have already mentioned [Dr. Kippis], and of whom I never think without emotion, is long since no more. But in appearing before an English tribunal, I will not fear injustice, if I have nothing to hope from partiality; and whatever may be the fate of my imperfect copy of a sublime model, I shall never feel that the moments were misspent, which I have employed in so soothing, and so noble a task.⁴²²

Note first the *ubi-sunt* of the phrase containing the quotation from Ossian. The self-association with Macpherson seems to suggest a relationship to the pseudo-translational complexities of the *Correspondence*. Ossian is employed as a pre-existing authority from whom she crafts the sense of lost time. The inclusion of Macpherson in this way connects with the use of a false god (the forged letters) as the authority to paint the picture of past

⁴²² Williams, *Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, pp. xi-xii.

times in *The Correspondence*. The selection is a rich field from which we can apply the analysis of her use of modesty and her *skopos-aequivocus*. She announces, pitifully, that she has no friends left in England, slyly pleading for compassion on the part of her critics by highlighting the clemency of friends as readers. She later appeals to the domestic sense of national pride with the insistence that she expects an English judgment to be just, the corollary, of course, being that justice is a national characteristic. She does not say that she is not afraid of standing before any court and expecting justice in a way that her universalism may suggest, require even. She is most certainly hedging her bets here and no wonder. This is, after all, her first foray into print since the critical disasters of the *Correspondence*. The humility with which Williams makes this address is remarkable. Her rhetorical dexterity is used to its greatest effect, with her special brand of self-deprecation showing her powers of textual manipulation to the full. The definition of the task is no less disingenuous. Describing her purpose simply that of producing a copy (and an imperfect one at that) of a sublime original, the modesty begins to feel a little strained. Williams never simply copies and for a translator of such confidence it is unlikely she felt this work to have been so flawed. As we have said, critics agree that no translation is perfect, no more than any *soi-disant* original play, poem or novel can be claimed as the model of generic perfection. Apologising for having produced an imperfect copy of a sublime model is a self-reflecting trick, for what is the aspect of sublimity so affecting, according to Kant, Burke and others, if not imperfection. Williams tends to use the word *sublime* as a describer for magnitude, awesomeness, and fearful aesthetic power (she recorded the *Fête de la Fédération* in 1790 as a ‘sublime event’) so we can probably ascribe this interpretative range here.⁴²³ Nonetheless, the dismissal of her own work as trifling, whilst it is a characteristic trope, rings decidedly false in a work which must have involved no small degree of effort to regenerate.

⁴²³ ‘[H]ad I not reached Paris at the moment I did reach it, I should have missed the most sublime spectacle which, perhaps, was ever represented on the theatre of this earth.’ Williams, ‘Letter I.’, *Letters Written in France, 1790*, p. 63.

Rather than the work of a copyist, the translation is used for a number of purposes, not least of which she subtly gives away in the preface's opening lines: 'After having so long withdrawn myself from the public eye, it is only under the auspices of the following work, that I should have ventured to appear once more in its presence.'⁴²⁴ Tentative steps into a harsh new world, once again. This translation is a rare example of a work which does not fit the paradigm of her revolutionary transmission project, as I have defined it, so we may not place it generically within the same sphere. It is for this reason that the Humboldt translations are not examined under the auspices of this thesis. The works are not only generically distinct, but are so capacious as to warrant a separate study entirely. However, I suggest their inclusion in Williams's translatorial canon as a point of pause, a momentary break from the charge of her revolutionary output up to the disastrous *Correspondence* and the renewal of her politically-informed crusading translation tendencies in the *Leper*. The work, in this sense, allows Williams a locus from which to regroup, reposition and to resume her adventures. The translation is the vessel which transports Williams back into the sea of public discourse. For prosaic, as well as artistic, reasons, she casts herself as the 'mariner', who, 'while he braves the element on which he steers his perilous course, is chiefly occupied by its dangers.'⁴²⁵ A suitable description for her political life and for her career in translation.

This chapter closes with a preface to the work representing a suitable bookend in the life of Williams, the last publication before her death, the *Souvenirs*, a work brimming with the interactions and paradoxes of translation with which she always connected. The book, written in French, is a translation of Williams's original English by her nephew, Charles Coquerel and is, therefore, a retranslation, a retranslation of Williams's own cultural translation (even her name undergoes a transformation on the title page). Moreover, it is an inter-translation, an intra-translation or retro-translation. The translations occur across cultures, languages, time

⁴²⁴ Williams, *Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, p. v.

⁴²⁵ Williams, *Personal Narrative*, Vol. I, p. vi.

and identities, bringing to life manifold complexities. I will suggest in a later chapter that this work is an instance of self-translation, both an auto-translation and a translation of the self.

The paratext here takes the form of the ‘Avertissement du traducteur’, or ‘Translator’s Foreword.’ Whilst the convention of the prefatory text described an *avertissement* is not unusual, (the practice was common and the Oxford French Dictionary online gives one of its definitions in the context, ‘au début d’un livre’, ‘at the start of a book’) the possible rendering of the noun as *warning* becomes interesting. Perhaps Coquerel, moreover Williams, pre-warns the reader to beware of placing complete trust in the slippery claims of such a shady operator as Williams. Probably not, but it is pleasing, in this context, to draw the connection.

Regarding the ideas of purpose and practice examined here, the work’s, or rather Williams’s, *skopos* is given at the start of the preface and results from two influencing forces. The first, concerning the public, is founded in the ‘motifs d’attachement et de longue reconnaissance pour l’auteur’, ‘motives of attachment and long recognition of the author.’ (Fr.).⁴²⁶ More importantly, and fittingly in light of Williams’s concern for textual and metaphysical afterlives, for reasons of posterity. Posterity, or the future, will, once again it is claimed, rearrange and settle things. ‘C’est l’avenir qui remettra tout à sa place,’ ‘It is the future that will put everything back in its place,’ Coquerel asserts, ‘Car l’avenir est un grand redresseur de torts,’ ‘for the future is a great righter of wrongs.’⁴²⁷ (Fr.). In times in which both revolutionary and royalist had lived as though outside history, there can, however, be no escape from time and history and, in order to make sense of the violent storm of events and principles, ‘l’essentiel est [...] de bien recueillir les faits,’ ‘it is essential to fully gather all the facts.’ (Fr.).⁴²⁸ The crown of objectivity (more appropriately, the mask, perhaps) is placed on

⁴²⁶ Charles Coquerel ‘Avertissement du Traducteur’, ‘Translator’s Forward’, in Williams, *Souvenirs de la Révolution Française; par Hélène-Maria Williams, Traduit de l’Anglais*, trans. by Charles Coquerel (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1827), p. v.

⁴²⁷ Coquerel, in *Souvenirs*, p.vi

⁴²⁸ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. vi.

Williams's head, crowning thereby her life and her literary career. The ideal, objective collector and recorder of these facts for posterity's judgement is, of course, Williams whose *Souvenirs* 'peut fournir de renseignements précieux.' 'can provide invaluable details.' (Fr.).⁴²⁹ Precious truths, perhaps. The *skopos*, then, is given as the desire to communicate Williams's eye-witness experience, presented as inviolable facts from which future interpretation and comprehension of the 1789 revolution can be assured. At the end of her life, Williams is finally named as the ultimate arbiter, mediator and communicator of the revolutionary narrative. She has, at last, 'carve[d] [her] name on an immortal monument.'⁴³⁰

There is, however, characteristically for a Williams preface, an apology:

Au risque d'exposer des vers à une traduction en prose, j'ai ajouté une seule pièce des nombreuses poésies de l'auteur: ce sont des *Stances sur la Prise de Missolonghi*. Cet hommage, rendu à la Grèce et à ses nobles défenseurs, ne m'a point paru tou-à-fait un hors-d'oeuvre, à la fin d'un livre où l'auteur exprime si vivement son admiration pour ces illustres martyrs français, qui sont morts pour la liberté comme meurent les Grecs.

At the risk of transposing verse into a translation in prose, I have added a single piece from the numerous poems of the author: it is *Missolonghi*. This homage, paid to Greece and to her noble defenders, did not seem entirely out of place here, at the end of a book where the author expresses so strongly her admiration for those illustrious French martyrs, who died for liberty just as had the Greeks.⁴³¹

It seems most improbable that Coquerel should have appended this without Williams's knowledge and indeed approval. In fact, the announcement at the start of the Forward as to time and the revolution is so close to other writings of Williams that it is arguably Williams herself speaking here, rather than Coquerel. In this sense, the work springs from Williams herself and the creation of a translator adds a further level of paradox and duplicity to the whole. The phraseology rings with Williams's idiosyncratic eulogistic prose:

⁴²⁹ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. vi.

⁴³⁰ Williams, *Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. xxvii.

⁴³¹ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. viii.; my trans.

Aujourd'hui, nous n'avons pas atteint le moment où il est possible d'écrire à fond et avec calme l'histoire de la révolution française, qui est incontestablement l'événement le plus influent des temps modernes.

Today, we have not yet reached the time when it is possible to write with distance and with equanimity the history of the French Revolution, which is incontestably the most influential event in modern times.⁴³²

These are the same words Williams repeats time and again in her translations and elsewhere, that she and her contemporaries have not yet reached the time of judgement of the most important event in what was modern history. The form of Williams becomes so visible here, the voice so audible, that it seems no great leap to suggest that Coquerel is overlaid as a simulacrum. The final word, in fact, belongs to Williams. The *skopos* as presented in the apology for the *Missolonghi* addendum becomes *aequivocus*, here, in so much as it represents the usual pleas for leniency at taking a liberty. It is actually a pro-active choice to include the work as it reflects succinctly the revolutionary ethos of Williams's Parisian afterlife, as I have defined it. The preface overall is a clever piece of propaganda. Propaganda for the revolution, but also for Williams as its most important documentarist.

The piece also encapsulates Williams's Romantic liminality. Occupying the space between the objective and subjective positions, in this work she is all the time present, yet absent, a trace, a kind of Schrodinger's cat, or a sub-atomic particle which disappears upon examination. She is a manifold presence in this work. Bassnett states that 'translations are visible traces of individual readings.'⁴³³ Williams, who makes herself (semi)visible in her prefaces herself becomes the trace of her reading, if we take reading to be her experience of the revolution and, more generally, of France itself in the years in which she lived there. She was always careful to make herself (almost) visible, so that her individual reading would provide, not only, the regeneration of the text, but of herself. But always from the security of

⁴³² Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. v.; my trans.

⁴³³ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 124.

the shadows, meaning she could claim objectivity and thereby secure trust. She mediated, not only the source text(s) of her experience, but also the means of expression and strategies of communication available to her with considerable expertise. As she claims in the preface to her *Poems* (1823), she has always ‘been treading on the territory of History [*sic.*]’ travelling with the modest hope that, ‘a trace of [her] footsteps will perhaps be left.’⁴³⁴

Whilst it is not a work belonging to Williams’s translational oeuvre *per se*, the collection of poems is remarkable for showing the aspects of modesty, *skopos* and *skopos-aequivocus* already discussed with regard to the translations from France. Predating the final work, the *Souvenirs*, by four years the *Poems* contains a preface which, while not a paratext in direct relation to a *translation proper*, is full of examples of the kind of mediation, or inter-cultural transmission, which Williams made her lifelong project. Williams’s preface here consists in the main of a celebratory litany of contemporary French poets, proving her an advocate of Anthony Pym’s interculturality⁴³⁵ and once again highlighting her position as mediator of the ‘Revolution [which] has produced more energy of talent, more seriousness of thought, more virtue, more philanthropy, and more religion, than existed in this country in any former period’⁴³⁶

Modesty and humility are evident, as is the *skopos-aequivocus* in her insistence that she has ‘long renounced any attempt in verse, confining [her] pen almost entirely to sketches of the events of the Revolution.’⁴³⁷ Evoking the revolutionary calling as being her only guiding

⁴³⁴ Williams, *Poems on Various Subjects: With Introductory Remarks on the Present State of Science and Literature in France* (London: G. and G. B. Whitaker, 1823), pp. ix-x.

⁴³⁵ Within Translation Studies, the argument over the question of the translator’s visibility has taken place largely in the work of opposing scholars, Anthony Pym and Lawrence Venuti. See various works by Pym and Venuti, particularly Venuti’s *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) and Pym’s response, ‘Venuti’s Visibility’, in *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* (John Benjamins Publishing), Vol. 8:1 (1996), pp. 165-177. See also Pym’s ‘On the Translator’s Visibility’ (speech at Monterey Institute of International Studies) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbYg7Yy1nfA>> [accessed 22/12/15].

⁴³⁶ Williams, *Poems* (1823), p. xxxvi.

⁴³⁷ Williams, *Poems* (1823), p. ix.

muse, she has forsaken all other endeavour. True, but we must once again state the scandal surrounding the Louis XVI letters as having done much to keep her from writing in the intervening years. However, it is appropriate that she make this claim as, as I have consistently argued, the transmission of the revolution (and France itself as a wider abstraction) became her lifelong project.

Reinscribing her mark on history, Williams take the opportunity to relate the story of the ‘Ode on the Peace’ omission:

The fourth poem which bears on its brow the mark of politics is an Ode on the Peace signed between the French and English at Amiens, in the year 1801. [...] The only memorable circumstance in the history of this Ode is its having incurred the displeasure of Buonaparte [*Sic.*]: he found it in a corner of the Morning Chronicle [*Sic.*], and it was translated into French by his order. He pretended to be highly irritated at the expression “encircled by thy subject-waves,” applied to England, and which he said was treasonable towards France; but what he really resented was, that his name was not pronounced in the Ode. However singular it may seem that he should have paid the slightest attention to such a circumstance, it is nevertheless true. The ambitious find time for every thing [*sic.*], and while they appear to be wholly absorbed by great objects, never lose sight of the most minute if connected with their own egotism. Buonaparte is no more; and perhaps we are too much disposed to forgive his treasons against liberty in favour of the expiation he has made. But those who have abused power must not escape the sentence of posterity because they were unfortunate. Buonaparte must appear at the bar of history to give an account of his legions and of that immense stock of human happiness confided to his care, and which he, guilty spendthrift threw away.⁴³⁸ [pp. xii-xiii]

The duplicitous nature of Williams and her paratextual visibility is found in an amusing instance of *Skopos-aequivocus*:

It being my particular purpose at present to plead the cause of Poets, I shall hastily pass over the merits of the French literati, and the other orators at the bar and in the legislature, who have acquired celebrity under the auspices of liberty. It would indeed be superfluous to relate what is already known; to repeat for instance, that the admirable philosophical discourses of M. Danou on history, the brilliant memoirs of M. Le Montey, the transcendent genius of Madame de Stael, belong to the new order of things; or, that at the bar, Dupin, Odillon-Barrot, Berville, the advocates of freedom, may stand with brow erect before the celebrated lawyers of the old despotism, who perhaps possessed equal abilities, but defended a less noble cause.

⁴³⁸ Williams, *Poems* (1823), pp. xii-xiii.

French eloquence, shackled in a thousand ways before the Revolution, burst at once into splendour, when the delegates of the people were permitted to proclaim their rights, and discuss their interests.⁴³⁹

Superfluous it may be, but she (re)proclaims her admiration for particular names, nonetheless. She sees these artists as having been freed by the revolution and allies herself with the names she invokes as belonging to a favoured caste of libertarians, more importantly true artists, true children of the revolution, the inheritors of the idea of freedom with which to communicate into the future. What is also striking here is the avocation of French eloquence. By this time, she had been a naturalised French citizen for six years and clearly felt the strength of conviction to fully proclaim the French language as interconnected with the concept of freedom itself. This freedom, curtailed by Napoleonic despotism, was delivered after the Hundred Days and Waterloo:

When, after the fall of Buonaparte, the legislators ceased to be mute, eloquence revived with the use of speech. The most splendid talents in the Chamber of Deputies belonged exclusively to the minority; the partizans [*Sic.*] of the past can boast of no such orators as Benjamin Constant, Royer-Collard, Daunou, General Foy, Chauvelin, Manuel, Saint-Aulaire, François de Nantes, D'Argenson, Duont de L'Eure, Girardin, Etienne, Bignot &c. [...] [R]eason and eloquence have a mighty power over public opinion, not only in France but throughout Europe. The enlightened traveller now visits Paris, not merely to gaze upon the façade of the Louvre, or the master-pieces of art; he hastens to the sanctuary where the great interests of mankind are nobly defended, and where the vanquished obtain the palms.

Before I attempt to give a Sketch of the Influence of the Revolution on French Poetry, it may be proper to repeat [...] that, in this country, politics have long absorbed almost entirely the public mind; not only on account of their magnitude, but because the connection of political events with the fate of individuals is here far more immediate and overwhelming than in old settled governments. It has indeed, been pretended that, the Revolution now being terminated, the people have given their dismission from public affairs; but this is not quite exact: if they no longer place themselves in the breach, they still maintain a post of observation, and their vigilant jealousy of the Charter, sole compensation of their sacrifices, leaves them little leisure for letters and arts. Yet at every period of the Revolution, even at the gloomy epocha of terror, there existed some minds who sought in books their most soothing consolations amidst their own dangers, or, which perhaps they found more difficult to

⁴³⁹ Williams, *Poems* (1823), p. xvi.

bear, the dangers of those who were dear to them. It requires to have been in such perilous situations to know the rapture of turning for a moment to Literature, from the turbulence of a world of commotion.⁴⁴⁰

As well as the regeneration of the phrase, ‘gloomy epocha’, there is always the emphasis in Williams on the importance on the political dimension in art and the necessity of immersion in the political struggle in literary creativity. We can mark the self-reference here. For, whilst she makes reference to ‘some minds’ she, no doubt, speaks of herself. We need only listen closely to her voice in the prefaces to the translation corpus in order to hear the resonances, the sometimes faint echoes of the semi-audible Williams. Williams was ever, if not always fully, visible in translation. ‘The keywords of visibility’, writes Kaisa Koskinen, ‘seem to be fairness, openness, explicitness, responsibility and honesty.’⁴⁴¹ As applied to the life and work of Helen Maria Williams, these are virtues readily attributable, but in a Romantic configuration of obverse terminology. Williams was both fair and unfair, open and concealed (and concealing), explicit and implicit, and honest and dishonest, often, if not always, *à la fois*. The final work of her life, the *Souvenirs*, exhibits her very particular practice of experimental expression of intercommunicating antonymic Romantic paradoxes showing her operating triumphantly from the mediatory ground of the liminal space which she had finally claimed, by the end of her life as her own.

⁴⁴⁰ Williams, *Poems* (1823), pp. xvii-xviii.

⁴⁴¹ Kaisa Koskinen, *Beyond Ambivalence: Postmodernity and the Ethics of Translation* (Tampere: University of Tampere, 2000), p. 98.

Chapter 6

The Leper of the City of Aoste

Of the several translations conducted from Paris, the 1817 translation of Xavier de Maistre's *Le Lépreux de la cité d'Aoste* (1811) as *The Leper of the City of Aoste* offers a unique site of centrality, an instance in which we see aspects of Williams's continual assimilation of influences coalesce, presenting an ideal case-study from which to expose further her fascinating praxis of creatively-faithful translation. Containing subtle interactions, subversions and linguistic experiments, the work is remarkable in several ways. Most importantly, it reveals a close engagement with European Romanticism, particularly the theories of German contemporaries, such as A. W. Schlegel and Schleiermacher, further entrenching Williams's position as mediator of Napoleonic European Romanticism. As well as contemplations as to the nature of divergent readerships and national literatures as discernible in her Preface, the work considers and reconfigures transpositions of romantic attributes, such as those concerned with moral and aesthetic dualities. It is also a translation which encounters associations with, and re-interpretations of Napoleonic iconography, both in direct dialogue with Maistre's work and through a filtering of Madame de Staël's views on Germany.

Staël's influence, through her friendships with Schlegel in particular and through her championing of German literature is detectable in Williams's translation of Maistre and the link with anti-Bonaparte feeling also makes its mark in the work. Of Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, Heinrich Heine remarked that, '[h]atred of the Emperor is at the heart of this book' and Williams was no stranger to these sentiments, having become firmly disillusioned with Bonaparte's rule in the first years of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴² Staël and Williams were

⁴⁴²Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed E. Elster (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, n.d.) vol. vi, pp. 25-6, cited in Lillian R. Furst trans., *The Contours of European Romanticism* (London: Macmillan, 1979),

surveilled extensively by the Napoleon, who was suspicious of the potentially volatile reception of their political writings. Staël was exiled in 1803, publishing *De l'Allemagne* in 1810, burnt by Napoleon as an anti-French tract, whilst Williams suffered the confiscation and banning of her translation of *The Correspondence*, also in 1803. Both tested the Napoleon's temper by wilful omissions of his name from contemporary works. The interactions between Williams and Staël provide further evidence for Williams's mediatory position in Napoleonic Europe. *The Leper of the City of Aoste* is also characterised in part by what I will show are enlightening instances of intertextuality with Wordsworthian themes and language, a continuation of the dialogic relationship between Wordsworth and Williams, as explored in the chapter concerned with *Paul and Virginia*.

In addition to and in interaction with the themes of Napoleonic reception and the multi-directional flow of ideas between Williams and Wordsworth, the consistency of German-influenced linguistic experimentation remains the most important element for discussion here. *The Leper of the City of Aoste* is in many ways, if not a companion piece then at least a successor to her earlier experiments in Anglo-French politico-cultural mediation in *Paul and Virginia*. *The Leper* shows the growth of a creative translator willing to address problematic subject matter, creating a palimpsest overlaid on Maistre's original prose which crackles with linguistic dynamism in a work refracted through the prism of post-Napoleonic European cultural exchange. Both *Paul and Virginia* and *The Leper* are linked in their diverse patterns of cultural and literary interplay.

In establishing and preserving this sense of correspondence(s), it is fitting, then, that Baudelaire provide the introductory remarks for this chapter as in the examination of *Paul and Virginia* in a previous chapter. Further to the exclamation concerning visionary capacity,

pp. 63-4. NB. Furst also makes the point that Mme de Staël's idealisation of Germany 'fused with her ulterior motives to turn *De l'Allemagne* from its very inception into an act of opposition to Napoleon.' p. 63

‘because I can conceive of a glorious existence, I believe I can achieve it. Ah, Jean-Jacques!’⁴⁴³ in *Mon coeur mis à nu*, in less-ambiguous praise than for Rousseau, Baudelaire celebrates the writer and counter-revolutionary theorist, Joseph de Maistre, considered along with Burke as a founder of modern conservatism, as an intellectual and political influence. ‘De Maistre et Edgar Poe’, Baudelaire asserts, ‘mon appris à raisonner’, ‘De Maistre and Edgar Poe taught me how to think’.⁴⁴⁴ Hailed by Baudelaire, as well as by Chateaubriand among others, as a candidate for the ecclesiarch of a new universal religion, Joseph de Maistre (1755-1821), a committed royalist, counter-revolutionary theorist and champion of Ultramontanism was instrumental in the publication of much of his younger brother, Xavier’s, work. Joseph’s political affinities make his brother’s work an interesting choice for Williams who, according to Kennedy, ‘regarded her own work as necessary to correct the misleading accounts written by counter-revolutionary writers.’⁴⁴⁵ As will be seen, Williams, herself a liminal and paradoxical character, was often engaged in much seemingly counter-intuitive endeavour, not least in her work in translation.⁴⁴⁶

Having fled Savoy in 1792 at the arrival of French revolutionary forces, Joseph de Maistre arrived in Lausanne in 1793 and was a visitor to Staël’s salon, during her residence there. Whilst in Lausanne, in 1794, Xavier left with him a manuscript, the *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (Voyage around My Room), which Joseph published the following year, in 1795.

The *récit* and its sequel, the *Expédition nocturne autour de ma chambre* (Nocturnal

⁴⁴³ Norman Cameron, trans., *Charles Baudelaire: My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings*, ed Peter Quennell (London: Soho Books, 1986), p. 209.

⁴⁴⁴ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Complètes*, I. 669; Cameron, p. 206. Ambiguity is present in the potential for the verb, *raisonner*. Cameron’s rendering, ‘how to think’ is good, but contains a *how* not literally present in the original French. ‘Taught me to think’, without the *how* of Cameron is a more forceful phrase, perhaps. Moreover, ‘to reason’ from *raisonner*, containing further philosophical and political connotations, is also possible. I highlight these nuances to show how, in a deceptively brief extract, the complexities of translation are ever-immanent.

⁴⁴⁵ Deborah Kennedy, ‘Benevolent Historian: Helen Maria Williams and Her British Readers’ in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke eds (NY: State University of New York, 2001), pp. 322-3.

⁴⁴⁶ In his biography of Thomas Jefferson, Christopher Hitchens states that, ‘it would be lazy or obvious to say that he [Jefferson] contained contradictions or paradoxes. This is true of everybody, and of everything. It would be infinitely more surprising to strike upon a historic figure, or indeed a nation, that was *not* subject to this law.’ *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America* (London: HarperPress, 2007), p. 5

Expedition around My Room) (1825) secured Xavier's reputation as a writer and have been granted, according to Richard Howard, 'a certain classical, or academic, success' though Xavier de Maistre remains little known in England.⁴⁴⁷ After fleeing the French occupation and later annexation of Savoy, the brothers became residents in St. Petersburg. Xavier returned to Turin in 1826, following his brother's death in 1821, from where he visited Paris for the first time and met St. Beuve. On his return to Russia in 1839, Xavier established a successful salon, which became a site of pilgrimage for French visitors to the capital. He died aged eighty-nine, in St. Petersburg in 1852.

Just as Baudelaire claimed a political education from Joseph de Maistre so, it could be suggested, his brother Xavier *taught* Williams *how to think* or at least, through the process of translation, how to reason through competing influences concerning domestic and wider-European politics and through developmental experimentations as a writer and translator. The obscure tale of a solitary, a recluse exiled from fellowship in some senses resonates with aspects of Williams's biography, self-exiled as she was in Paris, estranged from Britain and furthermore a foreign *émigré* viewed with suspicion by successive domestic political authorities.

The translation appeared in the same year as Williams was naturalised as a French citizen, a self-transformation analogous with the cross-cultural exchanges characterizing her literary life. Becoming a truly trans-national identity, Williams moved easily between cultures and contexts.⁴⁴⁸ The translations produced during Williams's Paris residency, particularly as will be seen in the case of *The Leper*, show the skill with which she negotiated alterity and the

⁴⁴⁷ Richard Howard, 'Introduction', in *Voyage Around My Room: Selected Works of Xavier de Maistre*, intro. Richard Howard, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (NY: New Directions Books 1994), p. viii.

⁴⁴⁸ See Josephine Grieder, *Anglomania in France 1740-1789: Fact, Fiction and Political Discourse* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1985).

adherence to a literary-philosophical universalism maintained throughout her life, the work becoming literary testimony of the self-styled ‘citizen of the world.’⁴⁴⁹

The preface to *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, like that to *Paul and Virginia*, describes translation as a means of psychological travel, a method of escape, of voyaging from and between environments, language, and culture. In translating *The Leper* not only for financial benefit, but also as temporary respite from the personal and political turbulence of her residence in post-revolutionary Paris, Williams sought access to recondite dimensions of language and of subject matter. Offering a defamiliarising text, she granted her British readership escape from quotidian milieus and allowed access into unfamiliar mental landscapes, mirroring not only her physical travel across continents, but also the attendant reconfigurations inherent to translating and the potential for change. The project is realized within the translation itself and in Williams’s process. In the crucible of the burgeoning modern Europe, Williams travelled between, and through, psycho-linguistic territories, arriving at a new and uncertain destination, an intersection connecting language, literature, and culture. Refining and developing various influences, Williams was ever-willing to destabilize, experiment and redefine, politically and artistically. Her work in translation provides the perfect field for this analysis.

As in the examples from Cameron’s Baudelaire, translation introduces changes often loaded with further potential for interpretation. Something is often lost while something else gained in the process defined by Umberto Eco as a negotiation between source and target languages, and between author, translator, and reader.⁴⁵⁰ *The Leper of the City of Aoste* mediates English and French literature and continental translation theory more broadly, operating in a heterogeneous linguistic territory. At once faithful and creatively liberal, not entirely English

⁴⁴⁹ Williams, ‘Letter II’, Fraistat and Lanser (eds.) *Helen Maria Williams: Letters Written in France*, p. 69

⁴⁵⁰ See Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat: Translation as Negotiation* (London: Orion Books, 2004).

nor French, Williams's language negotiates between the two and draws back the veil on foreign prospects, revealing both the linguistic and literary potential of the specific translational instance and the possibility for literary interconnection. Her choice of a problematic subject conveyed ideas informed by nascent French sensibilities concerning artistic and moral dualities and the expression of shaded experience, an aesthetic later to become a principle of French Romanticism.

The unusual style of her translations show a linguistic dynamism which hints at the progressive philosophies of Prussian contemporaries, such as Schleiermacher, concerning universalist language enrichment and internationalist translations. The Parisian circulation of much progressive German thought was due mainly to the efforts of Staël, the outspoken advocate of German cultural and political philosophy, in large part through her long-term association with A. W. Schlegel, whose writings on translation were influential in turn on the work of Goëthe and Schleiermacher.

Williams is known to have met Staël on at least one occasion in 1802 and maintained friendships with several German contemporaries. As a well-acquainted and active member of Parisian literati, she would doubtless have encountered Staël's work, particularly the record of her German travels, *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)* (1813) and would likely have been familiar with German linguistic and artistic philosophy, through the channels of communication common to Staël as well as through discussions regarding German texts.⁴⁵¹ In her translation of Maistre, Williams experiments with elements of German translation theory and with French ideas concerning challenging literary expression. Negotiating diverse strains of European thought, she produces an amalgamation of complex interactions between German, French, and British literature, as well as French and English Romantic aesthetics.

⁴⁵¹ Schlegel's essay, the *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide*, 'Comparison between the *Phaedra* of Racine and that of Euripides' (Fr.), for example, was published in French in Paris in 1807.

First published by Joseph, Xavier de Maistre's *Le lépreux de la cité d'Aoste* (1811), tells the Job-like story of a leper, sequestered in a tower in part of the ruined castle of the city of Aosta, Aoste (Fr.), principal city of the Aosta Valley, Vallée d'Aoste (Fr.) now a semi-autonomous region of Northern Italy.⁴⁵² The story concerns the sufferings of the leper, in particular the death of his sister, and his psychological struggles with extreme isolation. Maistre provides an indication as to the biblical precedent for the character as he has the leper read the 'Book of Job' towards the end of the story. Though lacking the humour of the better-known *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, the work is far from unrelentingly bleak. Told with pathos and profound empathy the story is a well-drawn examination of faith, guilt, shame, anger, death and love. Both the leper and the soldier are realised with depth and the longer sections of dialogue seldom run to cliché. Instead, Maistre presents a story of sensibility and psychological insight.

Xavier de Maistre was garrisoned in Aosta in winter 1793 during his service with Savoyard troops allied under Prince le Duc de Montferrat, fighting the French revolutionary forces who had invaded in 1792.⁴⁵³ It is here that he is believed to have met the leper Pierre-Bernard Guasco, resident of the *Tour de la Frayeur* (Tower of Terror) from 1773-1803 who had been imprisoned with his entire family to prevent contamination of the population.⁴⁵⁴ According to Richard Howard, in 1810 whilst in St. Petersburg, Maistre had attended a gathering where, during a debate regarding doubts as to the continued existence of the disease, he had 'excitedly describe[d] a leper he had known in Aosta'.⁴⁵⁵ Encouraged by Joseph, Xavier wrote the account (published anonymously in St. Petersburg the following year), a dialogue

⁴⁵² Situated in the Italian Alps, the city known today in Italian as Aosta is close to the Italian entrance to the Mont Blanc Tunnel. Aosta was a major city in the kingdom of Savoy, which was annexed to France in 1792 whereupon it was occupied by revolutionary forces. Subsequently returned to Piedmont-Sardinia in 1815, the region was finally annexed to France in 1860. Retained as part of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Aosta Valley became part of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

⁴⁵³ See Joseph Henry, *Histoire populaire, religieuse et civile de la vallée d'Aoste*, 2 vols (Aoste : Imprimerie Valdôtaine, 1959), II., p. 519.

⁴⁵⁴ See Charles M. Lombard, *Xavier de Maistre* (Michigan : Twayne Publishers, 1977), p. 15

⁴⁵⁵ Richard Howard, 'Introduction', in Sartarelli, trans., p. ix

between the leper and a passing soldier which forms a moving tale of sorrow and misfortune concerning a life of exclusion, detailing the leper's solitude following the death of his sister.

The work was introduced into Parisian circles by Williams's friend, Alexander von Humboldt, who commissioned her to translate the work into English.⁴⁵⁶ On 8 August 1817, Williams explained the project's genesis in a letter to Mary Jane Godwin. The 'tiny narrative' was already gaining some reputation in Paris, she wrote, with Humboldt and Chateaubriand, in particular, 'delighted with this little mournful production,' and with she herself requested to give it an 'english [*sic.*] dress.'⁴⁵⁷ Despite indicating the kind of domestication Venuti terms 'ethnocentric violence,'⁴⁵⁸ Williams's description of her translation as an exercise in disguising the foreign text in English camouflage is misleading. As Burwick argues, with reference to Staël's German-influenced views on translation, 'translation is a cross-pollination,' and in these terms Williams's innovative process is one which yields 'a richer bloom.'⁴⁵⁹ Keen to promote the work for pragmatic as much as artistic reasons, however, Williams entreated Godwin to assist in its sale and in securing favourable reviews, a request repeated in Williams's letter of 28 November 1817.

Reviews from *The British Critic* of November 1817 and from *The Monthly Review* of February 1818 contain strikingly similar critiques. While praising Williams's literary style and her skill as a translator, both reviewers strongly disapprove of her choice of subject. For the *British Critic*'s reviewer, Williams's translation contained 'a description of circumstances pathetic enough, according to the usual acceptance of the word; just as the sight of the "leper" himself would have been a pathetic sight.' So far so good, but, the critic suggests,

⁴⁵⁶ Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 187.

⁴⁵⁷ Helen Maria Williams to Mary Jane Godwin, 8 August 1817, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. C. 526, transcribed Deborah Kennedy. I am indebted to Deborah Kennedy for this source and am grateful for her generosity in providing me with her transcriptions of both the 8 August and 28 November 1817 letters from Williams to Mary Jane Godwin.

⁴⁵⁸ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 16.

⁴⁵⁹ Burwick, 'Translation,' 3, p. 1435.

‘Surely no painter would have selected such an object for painting.’⁴⁶⁰ The implication that, at least, no *British* painter would choose such a scene indicates the cultural divide across which Williams travelled as cross-cultural mediator. Antoine-Jean Gros’s 1804 painting *Bonaparte visitant les pestiférés de Jaffa le 11 Mars 1799* (Bonaparte visiting the plague-stricken in Jaffa), for example, with its vivid depiction of suffering and disease, would not have met with the *British Critic*’s approval. It is unlikely, given her anti-Bonapartist views, that Williams would have taken this striking example of Napoleonic propaganda as a model for her work. However, the image is useful in illustrating the contrast between British and French taste and cultural expectations concerning suitable subject matter.

The Gros image depicts Napoleon as a benevolent, messianic figure, unafraid of contact with plague victims in Jaffa, French soldiers stricken with the disease during the Egyptian Campaign 1798-1801. Administering a benediction through his god-like healing hand, Napoleon touches one emaciated soldier whilst others look towards him with hope of salvation. The religious aspect is unmistakable. Napoleon is the central figure in the scene. The plague house, in fact a mosque, is shrouded in darkness, save for the only light which illuminates Napoleon from above and bathes the naked figures to whom he (ad)ministers. Bathed in this holy light the soldiers resemble portrayals of biblical figures, their bodies evoking Christ or St. Sebastian. As Christ himself had touched the leper, Napoleon’s fingertips caress the lesions of a soldier, symbolically draped in the French *Tricolore*, and he possesses a look of profound sympathy. The lack of fear of contagion confirms Napoleon’s courage, his affinity for his men, his love of France, and inscribes his holy aura, rendering him unsusceptible to disease and providing the link between Napoleon and French kings who had traditionally healed sufferers of scrofula with a laying-on of hands. The painting was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1804, the year of Bonaparte’s coronation. A huge success, the

⁴⁶⁰ Review of *The Leper of the City of Aoste. A Narrative Translated from the French by Helen Maria Williams*, in *The British Critic* 8 (Nov. 1817), p. 548.

image, a beautiful work in the neoclassical style, is one of dubious provenance. The painting was probably commissioned by Napoleon to quell rumours that he had ordered his chief physician, Desgenettes to poison the soldiers with opium. The scandal is recorded by Scott in his *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte* (1832), with Scott commenting that insufficient evidence rendered the case unproved, but affirmed among the French.⁴⁶¹ The *British Critic* of March 1804 records the testimony from the journals of William Wittman, M. D. of the Royal Artillery, a physician with the British Army in Turkey, Egypt and Syria from 1799-1801. Wittman records that, having visited the site of the alleged massacre, “such a circumstance was positively asserted to have happened”, adding that while he was in Egypt, “an individual was pointed out to us, as having been the executioner of these diabolical commands.”⁴⁶² A remarkable piece of propaganda, the Gros painting is representative of much contemporary art, particularly that of David, concerned with the representation of Napoleon as father of the French nation.

By contrast, it is possible to position Maistre’s work as a piece of anti-Bonaparte sentiment, highly significant in 1811 when the work was first published and Maistre’s homeland of Piedmont-Sardinia was still under French rule, where it would remain until 1815. It is possible to suggest cultural negotiations once again operating in the work in the reversals of characterisation in a comparison of Maistre’s work against Gros’s painting and the figure of Napoleon in contemporaneous popular culture. In Gros’s work, Napoleon is unperturbed by the potential for disease among the soldiers. Maistre reconfigures this relationship by placing his soldier, a version of himself, as the character willing to approach the sufferer. This

⁴⁶¹ See Walter Scott, *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte, Emperor of the French with a Preliminary View of the French Revolution* 2 vols (Exeter: J and B Williams, 1832) I. 304-5.

⁴⁶² Extract from *Travels in Turkey, Asia-Minor, Syria, and across the Desert into Egypt, during the Years 1799, 1800, and 1801, in Company with the Turkish Army and the British Military Mission. To which are annexed, Observations on the Plague, and on the Diseases prevalent in Turkey, and Meteorological Journal*. By William Wittman, M. D. of the Royal Artillery, Member of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, and Surgeon to the British Military Mission, acting with the Army of the Grand Visier, in *The British Critic* March 1804, in *The British Critic and Theological Review for January, February March, April, May and June, Vol.23* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1804), p. 222.

reinscribes the humanity, nobility, courage, and sympathy of the anti-French character, a soldier in the Piedmontese army fighting against the French revolutionary forces at the time of Maistre's visit, but by 1810-11 firmly against Napoleonic rule in Aosta.

Despite its traditional style and obvious influence of David, the Gros painting represents a break with neoclassicism in its willingness to depict darker aspects of human suffering and therefore hints at the cultural shift in France towards a more Romantic aesthetic concerning light and dark, later proclaimed by Hugo, in particular. No doubt Williams would have been familiar with the painting, which was a huge success on its presentation at the Paris Salon in 1804. Her distinction in her preface to the *Leper*, discussed further in this chapter, between French and English mores, implies an understanding of this movement towards Romantic dualities and her presentation of the leper's story confirms it. In this sense, her position as mediator allows her the transmission of burgeoning German linguistic theory and French aesthetics in 1817 to an English readership. Domestic British Romantic production, informed by a reception of Williams, then returns to France where it influences French Romanticism as defined by Hugo in 1827. The intellectual current of circularity and interaction throughout the early part of the nineteenth century is indebted to Williams's cultural and literal translations, particularly *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, at this time.

The *Monthly*'s reviewer decides that the work is:

not without merit, for it is artless, and even interesting; the style is pleasing, the subject is affecting, and the sentiments are just:—but the sorrows of a loathsome disease can never be a favourite topic; they excite our pity, but do not command our sympathy; we relieve the sufferer but we avoid him; we exert ourselves to mitigate the evil of his situation, but we tire in listening to the recital of them. This is often the case in *real* life: but the disrelish may become disgust when a tale of *fiction* is formed of such materials.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶³ Review of *The Leper of the City of Aoste. A Narrative Translated from the French by Helen Maria Williams*, in *The Monthly Review* 85 (Feb. 1818), p. 220.

For both reviewers in *The British Critic* and *The Monthly*, neither the leper nor indeed leprosy was a suitable subject for a British audience, either in painting or in literature. However, it should be recalled that British culture by this time was not so puritanical as to be devoid of any portrayal of the darker recesses of human experience. In literature, Richardson's novel, *Clarissa* (1748), mentioned in Wordsworth's preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, exploring rape and abduction among other themes, is a work which springs readily to mind as having been within the cultural consciousness of 1817 and *Frankenstein* would be published one year after *The Leper* in 1818. In painting, Hogarth's and Gilray's cartoons as well as works such as John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778), an arresting image of a drowning man about to be attacked by a huge shark, had all contributed to a public artistic consciousness. The work of Joseph Wright of Derby, with its manipulation of extreme light and shade, such as in the 1768, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* and *The Alchemist in Search of the Philosopher's Stone* (1771), suggest experimentation with the aspects of sublimity introduced in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). By the early 1800s, however, British art was dominated by the landscape works of Constable and Turner, master of light, in particular. Despite evidence of attention to chiaroscuro and other experimentation with shade and obscurantism, it is difficult to attest to any concentrated efforts on the depiction of leprosy or similar illness at the time of Williams's translation. As well as the portrayal of disease, of particular significance to Williams's reviewers would seem to be the moral dimension attached to works portraying unsavoury humanity. This would undoubtedly have been considered as a particularly French attribute. The critics, deeming the work typically French based on its original language, suggest that Williams's choice of subject lacks the moral ingredient which renders an uncomfortable work suitable for a morally superior British audience. This would be another journalistic attack on Williams herself, as well as of the French by extension, as

Williams seems, in her preface, to suggest an intellectual and political superiority of the Parisian literati with whom she associates.

With characteristic and perhaps false modesty (reminiscent of the similar tone of apology found at the start of *Paul and Virginia*), Williams offers the following:

This slight performance is presented by the Translator with great diffidence to the English reader, (although in France it has obtained the suffrage of celebrated names,) since there are circumstances which may have rendered the critics too indulgent. The great interests of the revolution have led almost every eloquent writer in this country to give to politics those powers of mind, which in calmer periods of human history, would have been devoted to more soothing meditations. When, therefore, we chance to meet with a few pages remote from the Order of the Day, we delight, perhaps too much in the new sensations which they excite. Sickened of the commotions of states, and almost despairing of mankind in the midst of their warring crimes and passions, we turn willingly from the turbulence of public calamity to hear the complaint of the poor Leper, bewailing the unbroken stillness of his solitude; while we are ready to answer his regrets in the words of the Traveller, “Oh if you knew the world as I do!”⁴⁶⁴

There is a double-edged compliment to her English readers here. Williams implies that French intellectuals, concerned with daily politics, have been too willing to embrace the escape offered by the leper’s story and by similar trifles. English readers, comfortably ignorant of the turbulence of French political life would be more critical in their appraisal. From the pen of such a renowned Francophile, the sentiment feels suspicious and is, I argue, disingenuous on Williams’s part. In fact, it implies an admiration for Williams’s Parisian associates and for their *engagé* commitment to political struggle. Williams, ever-attracted to the intensity of Paris and to the intellectual vibrancy of post-revolutionary cosmopolitanism, hides a criticism of English political and intellectual culture beneath a synecdoche of praise for a more discerning British audience.

⁴⁶⁴ *The Leper*, p.vi-vii

The ring of faux-modesty and faint praise is also traceable in the preface to *Paul and Virginia* where Williams, having hoped to ‘deserve the humble merit of not having deformed the beauty of the original,’ explains her omissions, as we have seen, in terms of different characteristics of the two nations:

...the serious and reflecting Englishman requires, in novel writing, as well as on the theatre, a rapid succession of incidents, much bustle and stage effect, without suffering the author to appear himself, and stop the progress of the story; the gay and restless Frenchman listens attentively to long philosophical reflections, while the catastrophe of the drama hangs in suspense.⁴⁶⁵

It is not only critics who mark a distinction between the British and French readerships then, and despite her leanings towards a universalist approach to literature, Williams seems to harbour a bias towards the superiority of French and in continental culture, the attributes of which she wished to transport to England in order to effect change. Her skill as linguistic mediator is again employed in the preface, which, by praising her English audience secures an interest in the work’s appraisal.

Williams’s desire to translate sensibility and Romantic morality fuelled her endeavour. The moral dimension, considered absent by the reviewers in the *British Critic* and the *Monthly* is represented, for Williams, in both the sentimental tale itself and in the psychological reception of the reader in comprehension of suffering. Continental superiority derives in part from the morality of her Parisian contemporaries in their attention to national and international politics, power and society. This is for Williams, a peculiarly French dimension, anathema to some writers in Britain who regarded her as the unfortunately misjudged, if not traitorous, messenger of a corrupt society, France, whose culture entirely lacked the moral certainties of that in Britain.

From the *British Critic* again:

⁴⁶⁵ Williams, *P & V*, Preface, p.iv.

What moral is to be derived, what pleasurable feeling is to be excited, in short, what object, except that of exciting disagreeable sensations, is to be answered by the detailed delineation of all the miseries incident to a situation so perfectly horrible as that of the poor being who forms the subject of this narrative, we profess not to understand; and till we do, we doubt whether we shall “catch the enthusiasm” which, Miss Williams describes herself to have caught, from the “distinguished literati,” among whom she heard it read, and by whom it was so profoundly admired⁴⁶⁶

Williams was admired for her skill as a translator, although her choices were deemed sometimes ill-conceived; the case of *The Correspondence* is the testament to this fallibility. Despite the damage caused to Williams’s reputation as a result of the scandal surrounding the misjudged use of *The Correspondence* as supporting revolutionist testimony, however, a positive reappraisal of her skill as a translator came with the monumental endeavour of the translation of Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative*. According to Nigel Leask, the *Monthly Review* had ‘praised her to the skies’ in 1816 for her translation of Humboldt’s 1810 original.⁴⁶⁷ In fact, Williams’s technical skill was so admired in the *Monthly Review* that, Leask records, the reviewer regretted that Williams had not “‘deem[ed] herself authorised to take the liberty of remodelling’” a work which would have ‘gained largely on being recast by her hands.’”⁴⁶⁸ By the time of Humboldt’s request to translate Maistre’s work, Williams’s art was not wholly praised nor damned, but her choice of subject was problematic.

The unfortunate leper was felt by British critics to be a singularly unsuitable figure for the presentation of literary pathos or for the stimulation of pleasurable reading. A figure capable of stirring an instinctive sympathetic psychological response, the leper obstructs these feelings by provoking disgust. Contempt for the leper’s physical deformities and the evidence of disease (allied with the fear of contagion) preclude the reader, at least in the view of the

⁴⁶⁶ Review from *British Critic*, p. 548.

⁴⁶⁷ Nigel Leask, *Salons*, ‘Alps and Cordilleras: Helen Maria Williams, Alex von Humboldt and the discourse of Romantic Travel’, in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 218.

⁴⁶⁸ Leask, p. 218

Monthly and *British Critic*'s reviewers, from an engagement with the character and therefore obscure the *purpose* of the narrative. Indeed, what moral *is* to be found in the dialogue? Maistre's epigraph provides a clue to the reader, but a clue which would have been lost to Williams's critics: the epigraph is omitted from the 1817 Cowie publication which the *Monthly* and *British Critic*'s reviewers address and does not appear in any later translations. It is not clear whether Williams received a manuscript from Humboldt *sans* the persuasive section of James Thompson's sentimental rhetoric from his poem, *The Seasons* (1730) or whether Williams chose to remove it. It would not be incongruous with Williams's character as a translator to assume the latter – her omission of large sections of *Paul et Virginie* and the addition of her own sonnets to the same work prove her courageous creativity in translation – but it remains a strange omission for a writer of sensibility as it would seem to challenge criticisms of an occluded moral function in the tale. After all, Williams was someone who had claimed that in her writing she wished to 'trace humanity pouring balm into the wounds of the oppressed.'⁴⁶⁹ In the original work, words, in English, from Thompson's *Seasons* (*The Winter*) give clear indication as to the sympathetic response Maistre wishes to excite and to where he would point his readers' morality:

Ah! little thinck the gay licentious proud,
Whom pleasure, power and affluence surround . . .
Ah! little thinck they, while they dance along . . .
How many pine!... how many drinck the cup
Of baleful grief!... how many shake
With all the fiercer tortures of the mind!⁴⁷⁰

Few readers would like to imagine themselves licentious and proud. Less so when the reader is reminded to consider, and perhaps compare, the sorrows of those less-fortunate creatures, afflicted with disease and mental instability. The moral is clear that the reader is bound to

⁴⁶⁹ Williams, *Letters from France*, 8 vols in 3, intro. Janet Todd (Delmar, NY: Scholars and Facsimile Reprints, 1975), 2.4. p. 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Xavier de Maistre, *Oeuvres de M. le Comte Xavier de Maistre*, vol. 1 : *Voyage autour de ma chambre; Le lépreux de la cité d'Aoste* (Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1825), p. i.

remember, whatever his elevated state, the plight of the less fortunate souls in various states of torment. The morality is not an incitement; it does not promote radical societal change or suggest help for an amelioration of circumstances, indeed the soldier simply leaves the leper at the end of the story. The tale's moral agency is one of psychological change; it is a fable of fellow-feeling, educative in a compassionate sense. It is little wonder that Williams, long-term advocate of compassionate and egalitarian politics and, for Kennedy, 'spokesperson for the civilized ethos of an "enlightened age"' should have been caught by the enthusiasm of Chateaubriand and others of her circle.⁴⁷¹

Whilst it is odd that the useful device of the epigraph is absent in the translation, it is, therefore, no surprise that a narrative charged with such pathos should have captured the attention of a writer of such renowned sensibility as Williams. The preface highlights an emotional dimension to her reception as guiding her 'desire' to translate the tale. This is again perhaps misleading, as Williams was, of course, asked to undertake the work as a service to her friend, Humboldt and for financial gain. However, as the Godwin letters show, she was, after initial encounters with the text, 'sufficiently affected with the narrative to feel the desire of giving it an English dress.' Williams's language of feeling here shows the impetus for her engagement with the text and the clue as to her view of the translation process. Despite the admission of domestication, the Anglicisation of Maistre's work in recognisable linguistic attire, a sort of overlaying of English over the original, Williams affirms the primacy of the original work as the site from which to derive and develop meaning. The text's moral message, if so it can be termed, and its emotional core are immanent in the source text.

Williams has not created these in the target text, rather, she gives Maistre's text a Benjaminean afterlife, by negotiating a re-inscription, mediating a reconstruction through philosophical-linguistic travel. Williams's translation carries the message and transports the

⁴⁷¹ Kennedy, 'Benevolent Historian', p. 322.

text across space, time and language in so-doing approaching universalist ideals of pure language as discussed by Schleiermacher and later, Benjamin.

Paradoxically, in approaching the original, at least in the manifesto of the preface, Williams takes up a position consistent with the philosophy of contemporary theorists, but she falls somewhat short of a clear declaration of working in German modes of translation, in insisting that the work, in linguistic reconfiguration is also made appropriate for an English readership. Perhaps, then, she is guided in part by the will to domestication, akin to traditional French attitudes to assimilative translation, which Prussian nationalist theorists had dismissed in their rejection of French literary and political dominance.

What is most remarkable is the view, shared and shaped by the Germans, that there is a universal plane of understanding, translatable across national languages. Suffering, and the response elicited, is commonly understood across cultures, linguistic difference is the threshold. However, as Schleiermacher and others would suggest, linguistic difference is couched in cultural context, language contains specific hermeneutic significance which must be approached and understood in order to effect adequate translation. Williams, though promising an 'English dress', was perfectly placed to approach the French text as she herself was fully immersed in French culture and maintained an eternal mission to translate cultural and political ideas through her *Letters* for which she was consistently criticised in the British press. Her experiments with language in the *Leper* reveal a continuous push-and-pull as she negotiates between cultural forces.

Whilst suggesting perhaps a hierarchical view of language in her preface, a concept of contemporary discourse since Montaigne's and of particular significance in European nationalist debate, Williams does not place English as the superior language in the sense of any significance as to pride in a nationalist identity. Rather, her view is one of an

internationalist vision of interaction between languages with primacy afforded according to formative familiarity. In claiming the hierarchical pinnacle as occupied by the language with which one is most able to conceptualise and to respond emotionally (the system within which the subject first became conversant in the language of feeling), Williams reinforces a nationalist view of the primacy of English, but the publication of her final work, the *Souvenirs* (translated from English and published in French only) reveals the highly emotional remembrances of her Parisian afterlife expressed in French. Arguably, the sentiment rings somewhat false and is perhaps an effort, once again, to win over a British audience:

Although long habit may render a foreign tongue as familiar as our own, we love best to weep over sorrows recorded in that language in which our earliest emotions were felt; and our first accents were uttered.⁴⁷²

The expression bears comparison again with the preface from *Paul and Virginia*:

My last poetical productions, (the sonnets which are interspersed in this work,) may perhaps be found even more imperfect than my earlier compositions; since, after a long exile from England, I can scarcely flatter myself that my ear is become more attuned to the harmony of a language, with the sounds of which it is seldom gladdened; or that my poetical taste is improved by living in a country where the arts have given place to arms.⁴⁷³

Again, Williams hails the ‘harmony’ of English, whilst criticising French politics. However, the textual content of *The Leper of the City of Aoste* often provides a strange and disharmonious blend of linguistic influences with the resulting English phraseology, at times, unusual and alienating.

Williams sees translation as vital, even were one to be fully conversant in a foreign language. Her conception of commonality of understanding comes from a progressive perspective, with domestic primacy stemming from initial, formative acquisition, and in this sense her

⁴⁷² Williams, *The Leper*, pp. v-vi

⁴⁷³ Williams, *P & V*, p. x.

philosophy shares similarities to the Prussian formulations of trans-national, trans-cultural, even trans-historical hermeneutic commonality. However, the problem with this configuration is the paradox as to the nature of language as either sets of independent yet interchangeable signs, or as sets of culturally-bound referential packages, always carrying contextual baggage. Williams perhaps offers both understandings, that whilst translation is possible, necessary, in order to provide access to the monolingual reader, even for the reader possessing fluency in a foreign language translation is fundamental in transferring the metaphysical content sited within the work, above and outside the language used to describe it.

Williams signals a familiarity here with emerging European aesthetic philosophy and its relationship to translation practice in her choice of such a resistant subject. A bold mediator of contemporary thought, Williams was a translator willing to approach the foreign and offer the disturbing prospect of psychologically challenging alterity. There are resonances here with Hugo's declaration in the Preface to *Cromwell* (1827) ten years later:

Tout dans la création n'est pas humainement beau, le laid y existe à coté du beau, le difformé près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière.

Everything in nature is not beautiful in human terms. Ugliness exists beside beauty, deformity close to grace, the grotesque behind the sublime, evil with good, shadow with light.⁴⁷⁴

Williams was, then, a cultural translator in terms of her early acknowledgement of dualities at the avant-garde of developments in France, proving, in her choice of an unwieldy subject, an early advocate of Hugo's Romantic manifesto in its affirmation that Romantic poetry would 'se mettre à faire comme la nature, à mêler dans ses créations . . . l'ombre à la lumière, le

⁴⁷⁴ Victor Hugo, 'Preface to *Cromwell*' (1827), *Théâtre complet*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963), 1. p. 416; my trans.

grotesque au sublime' (charge itself with doing as nature does, in mixing her creations . . . darkness to light, the grotesque into the sublime).⁴⁷⁵

Williams's reinvention of Maistre is the translational paradigm for the Romantic combination of the grotesque and the sublime. The language itself is often a conjunction of ungainly phraseology and beautiful poetry. Faithful translation, characterized by awkward renderings in the target language, is often juxtaposed with creative flights and poetic flourishes, together reflecting the *Entsagung*, for Steiner, the 'renunciation of self in the enveloping authority of the original', of A. W. Schlegel's approach to translation⁴⁷⁶; Schleiermacher's insistence on the transportation of the reader towards the foreign text; and the notion of translation as a creative endeavour, akin to the production of poetry, as championed by Novalis in the letter to A. W. Schlegel of 30 November 1797. Williams's boldness in this respect has its precedent in *Paul and Virginia*, most obviously in her excising large sections of Bernardin's prose and in her addition of several of her own sonnets to the text. In *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, Williams's practice of creative-fidelity is remarkable for its frequency. The target text swings almost continuously between leaden transcription and delicate poetry, arguably an inconsistent method, but altogether a more experimental approach than would be suggested by traditional views of translation as mechanical transcription. Williams's praxis thereby further informs and complicates questions of translational impossibility and the paradox of equivalence, concerns explored by Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose contemporaneous conjecture on the subject is best expressed in the introduction to his translation of *Agamemnon* of 1816.

Despite an intuitive reception of Maistre's story as a distinct, original and therefore, *true* text, temporal, historical and linguistic variations in some ways complicate the sense of an

⁴⁷⁵ *Cromwell*, 1. p. 416; my trans.

⁴⁷⁶ Steiner, p. 401.

originating and definite source text. These negotiations show not only the importance of the target language translator, but also the subtle *non-dit* translations occurring during the source text's production. On the first page of the translation, names of people and places contain a dense network of interactions. The leper's home is the Tower of Bramafan, once the Castle of Bramafan, where, according to a local story René de Challont, Renato di Challant (It.) (1502-65), the Comte de Challant ('René de Chalans' in Maistre), had imprisoned his wife in a fit of jealousy and left her to starve to death. René, had taken the Portuguese Mencie de Bragance, Mencia di Braganza (It.), as his second wife. Maistre's text names her as Marcie de Bragance and explains that the term, *Bramafan* signified, in the local Franco-provençal dialect, *crying of hunger* or *the cry of hunger*. Originating details of the story and its provenance are uncertain (there is conjecture as to whether or not the tale applies to René's first wife, Blanche-Marie Gaspardone, for example), but the anecdote is recorded in several travel histories from the 1800s. S. W. King, for example, states that the tower of Bramafan had probably been so-named during the famine which had lasted for three years from 1337 when the tower had been used as a food store.⁴⁷⁷ Maistre, through the leper, admits the dubious veracity of the story ('Cette anecdote, dont on pourrait contester l'authenticité,' (This story, of which we could question the authenticity)).⁴⁷⁸ The complicated transformations of names, places, and histories show the intricacies of translation at work even before Williams has encountered the text. As well as engagement with textual and hermeneutic transposition, in negotiating names, Williams establishes a middle-ground. The *Piené di Chalans* is a mixture of Italian and French; her 'Princess Mencia, of Bragance' a melange of French, Italian and English; and her *Bramafare*, a strange variation on an already translated term.

⁴⁷⁷ S. W. King, *The Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps: A Tour through the Romantic and Less-frequented "Vals" of Northern Piedmont, from the Tarentaise to the Gries* (London: John Murray, 1858), p. 127. See also, Dudley Costello, *Piedmont and Italy, from the Alps to the Tiber, Illustrated in a Series of Views Taken on the Spot*. 2 vols. (London: James S. Virtue, 1861); George-Auguste Matile, *Musée historique de Neuchâtel et Valangin*, (Neuchâtel : Petitpierre 1843); David-Guillaume Huguenin, *Les châteaux Neuchâtelois : anciens et modernes* (Neuchâtel : Henri Wolfrath, 1843).

⁴⁷⁸ Maistre, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1. p. 226.

Changes occur in Maistre's original across time and geography and then through Williams into the target text according to her choices. In the introductory pages using, by turns, a combination of French, English, and Italian for several names, Williams then anglicises the 'Hôpital Saint-Maurice' to 'St. Maurice's Hospital.'⁴⁷⁹ An English dress, indeed. However, Williams's maintaining of the French, *parterre*, nearby shows a movement towards the source language, suggesting the type of trans-lingual universalism which characterized much of Schleiermacher's thought, for example, concerning separate systems and specialized cross-lingual translation lexicons.⁴⁸⁰

It would be unnecessary and burdensome to list here all the awkward phrases, omissions, and additions contained in the translation.⁴⁸¹ An approximate count of discrete examples of significance occurring in the translation shows 171 instances of notable sites for analysis within the texts. Selected examples here will serve as illustrations of Williams's fascinating praxis which she has, by now, fully developed. Williams often uses the noun, *rapidity*, for the French, *rapidité*, where *speed* seems always more appropriate, in one case even using the phrase 'rapidity of lightning.'⁴⁸² The OED Online shows the phrase, *speed of lightning*, was in contemporary use and gives several citations of the phrase in print. This jarring, yet comprehensible choice, characteristic of Williams's experimental style, adheres to fidelity at the expense of domestic familiarity and in doing so, highlights the foreignness of the originating text by the imposition of a version of non-standard English. The attendant obverse of Williams's occasionally mechanical prose. 'You interest me sensibly' appears for 'Vous m'intéressez vivement', where *deeply*, *greatly*, or *keenly* spring to mind more readily.

⁴⁷⁹ Maistre, p. 228.; Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ See *On the Different Methods of Translating (Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens*, 1813) (trans. Douglas Robinson), in Robinson, pp. 225-238.

⁴⁸¹ On page 7, for example, Williams omits the phrase, 'et de les voir' (and of seeing them/looking at them) from a description of flowers. On page 9 she renders the 'meditations d'un solitaire' (meditations of a recluse/solitary man), as the more poetic, 'meditations of solitude.'

⁴⁸² Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 24.

Williams's feel for poetry is consistently detectable.⁴⁸³ A further use of *rapidity* introduces an example illustrative of Williams's poetic touch as well as unusual choices. On page 15 Williams has the years 'roll[ing] on' rather than flying by with the same 'rapidity.'⁴⁸⁴ She chooses 'roll on' for 's'envolent,'⁴⁸⁵ rather than a more faithful *fly* or *fly by*, a significant interpretation and change in the sense of each word in terms of the pace at which one imagines them passing, then retaining a literal translation of *rapidité*: 'les années s'envolent avec la même rapidité,' 'years roll on with the same rapidity.'⁴⁸⁶ Again *speed* seems more appropriate here and the phrase is somewhat wooden. The *mélange* of fidelity and creativity is marked here as Williams continues: 'There is besides, at the last point of misfortune, an enjoyment which the world in general cannot know, and which may seem singular; it is that of existing, of breathing.'⁴⁸⁷ Faithful to *last point of misfortune* (a somewhat strange phrase in English), it is the omission of 'and' in translating Maistre's 'd'exister *et* de respirer' (my emphasis) which gives a rhythm and weight not sensed in the original.⁴⁸⁸ The music is in the silence as much as in the notes here. The pause is a very small, but very significant choice and one which shows Williams's feel for poetic recasting.

Poetic recasting at times may be a recasting of poetry, and Williams's creativity may illuminate some hitherto uncertain details concerning her knowledge and reading of Wordsworth.⁴⁸⁹ If, as Kennedy states, Williams knew nothing of Wordsworth in 1814, when she first met Henry Crabb Robinson, the text of *Leper* suggests that she had, by 1817, learned

⁴⁸³ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 25.; Maistre, p. 259.

⁴⁸⁴ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 15.

⁴⁸⁵ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 15.; Maistre, p. 244.

⁴⁸⁶ Maistre, p. 244.; Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 15.

⁴⁸⁷ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 15.

⁴⁸⁸ Maistre, p. 244.

⁴⁸⁹ Williams was the addressee of Wordsworth's first published poem, "Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress" (1787), published under the pseudonym, "Axiologus." Wordsworth attempted unsuccessfully to meet Williams on a trip to France in 1791 and the two had crossed paths in 1792 (Wordsworth was in Blois whilst Williams had returned for two months to England in summer 1792). They finally met in Paris in October 1820.

more about the younger poet.⁴⁹⁰ Translating the leper's happy imaginings of young lovers, Williams renders them 'favored beings,'⁴⁹¹ an unusual phrase found in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and *The Excursion* (1814) but without precedent in Maistre; Maistre's leper states simply: 'Je crois les voir errans ensemble' (I believe I see them wandering together).⁴⁹² Kennedy notes that, prior to first meeting Wordsworth in 1820, Robinson sent her copies of Wordsworth's work (Robinson's *Diary* specifies a sonnet in 1814 and the Thanksgiving Ode in 1816).⁴⁹³ Given the coincidence of Robinson's August 1817 visit to Williams with her commencement of work on her translation, Robinson may well have provided her with a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* or *The Excursion*, or she may have taken advantage of the post-Napoleonic restoration of regular communications between France and Britain to develop her knowledge of Wordsworth through other sources.

Reading 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree' from the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* alongside Williams's *Leper* exemplifies how Williams's imaginative style comprises multi-directional negotiations that interweave elements from the three texts: Maistre's, Wordsworth's, and her own.⁴⁹⁴ The 'favored [*sic.*] being' of Wordsworth's poem is a solitary figure, a man remembered by the unnamed narrator to the passing 'Traveller,' whose dialogic function resembles that of Maistre's passing soldier.⁴⁹⁵ Maintaining a distanced critique of the world from the vantage of his yew tree seat, Wordsworth's solitary finds himself 'against all

⁴⁹⁰ Kennedy *Helen Maria Williams*, p. 200: See also, Thomas Sadler, ed, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister at Law*, 3rd ed, 2 vols. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1869), 1. p. 299, n. 1.

⁴⁹¹ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 20.

⁴⁹² Maistre, p. 251.; my trans.

⁴⁹³ Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams*, p. 200. In a letter to Williams on 7 October 1814, Robinson 'cop[ied] a sonnet by Wordsworth'; on 15 May 1816, he 'forwarded to Miss H. M. Williams, Wordsworth's Thanksgiving Ode [*Ode. 1815*] recently published.' See Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed Edith J. Morley, 3 vols (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), 1. p. 150 and 1. p. 180.

⁴⁹⁴ I specify the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* as 'favored being' does not appear in the anonymous 1798 edition.

⁴⁹⁵ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, With Other Poems*, 2nd ed, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1800), 1. p. 22.

enemies prepared, / All but neglect' (a fitting description too of Williams's leper).⁴⁹⁶ In his lonely vigil, the solitary heightens his sense of exile by 'gaz[ing] / On the more distant scene,' until it grows 'Far lovelier, and his heart could not sustain / The beauty still more beauteous.'⁴⁹⁷ In like manner, Williams's leper 'forever pictur[es] [...] societies of sincere and virtuous friends, of congenial hearts, united in connubial happiness, with all the gifts of health, youth, and fortune.'⁴⁹⁸ The sight of these 'favoured beings wandering together under greener and fresher foliage,' whose destiny and happiness seem proportional to the leper's misery, becomes unbearable:

I could not support the sight; the torments of hell had entered my heart; I turned away my looks, and precipitated myself into my cell. Oh. God! how deserted, dark, and frightful it appeared to me! 'It is here then,' said I to myself, 'that my abode is fixed for ever! It is here that, dragging on a miserable existence, I must wait the lingering period of my days!'⁴⁹⁹

Wordsworth's poem warns against the pride and arrogance of self-exclusion: detachment means a loss of one's humanity. Wordsworth, rather, exhorts compassion and proscribes antipathy and misanthropy. Pride, the narrator states, 'is littleness,' and '[t]he man, whose eye / Is ever on himself, doth look on one, / The least of nature's works.'⁵⁰⁰ True knowledge, asserts Wordsworth, "leads to love," and "dignity" does not sacrifice self-reverence to self-criticism.⁵⁰¹ Williams applies this theme to the characters for whom the leper feels at once such disdain and such admiration. Picking up on Wordsworth's description of the Solitary 'favoured' in his ambitious youth, before being stymied by neglect, Williams rather casts the happy souls of the leper's *imagination* as 'favoured beings,' similarly signifying a state of mind unfettered by pride and self-regard. Williams at once assimilates Wordsworth's

⁴⁹⁶ Wordsworth, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁷ Wordsworth, p. 23.

⁴⁹⁸ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 20.

⁴⁹⁹ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, pp. 38-9.

⁵⁰⁰ Wordsworth, p. 24.

⁵⁰¹ Wordsworth, p. 24.

warning against self-obsession and judgment—the more fortunate are granted the happier state because they do not suffer the leper’s mournful, autogenous alienation—while also suggesting the outcast imagination as a site of (potential) self-recognition; in projecting happiness on others, he has begun anatomizing the cause of unhappiness in himself. It would seem, that in this respect, *The Leper of the City of Aoste* points to Williams’s growing familiarity with a Wordsworthian poetics of imagination, her own imaginative style harmonizing and enriching its source texts.

The work is replete with examples of Williams’s idiosyncratic technique and examples are numerous. A final instance serves to illustrate some of the negotiations at work. In the section cited above, concerning the leper’s description of the embrace of the newly-married young couple, Maistre says, of the husband: ‘qui la serra dans ses bras avec transport. Je sentis mon coeur se serrer.’⁵⁰² Williams renders the first section as ‘who pressed her with transport in his arms.’⁵⁰³ This is, of course, perfectly acceptable English (an example of the phrase in fact appears in Mary Shelley’s *Mortal Immortal*)⁵⁰⁴ but, whilst faithful, for such a celebrated poet of sensibility as Williams, the language feels very awkward indeed. Rather, ‘he took her rapturously into his arms’⁵⁰⁵ or ‘he clasped her passionately in his arms’.⁵⁰⁶ The faithfulness of Williams’s prose here renders the phrase bereft of some of the intensity felt in a more poetic interpretation, but the choice of a literal correspondence maintains adherence to the alterity of the original. The phrase is followed immediately with poetry and invention: ‘I felt my heart sicken and grow chill within me’ is Williams’s version of Maistre’s ‘je sentis

⁵⁰² Maistre, p. 276.

⁵⁰³ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 39.

⁵⁰⁴ Shelley’s story contains the line given by the narrator, Winzy, regarding an early encounter with his future wife, Bertha: ‘I clasped her in my arms with transport’. Mary Shelley, ‘The Mortal Immortal’, in *Transformation* (London: Hesperus Classics, 2004), p. 39. In consistent style, Williams regains textual and linguistic fidelity, her poetic ear momentarily deaf to the quirky rendering of Bernardin’s ‘et la baisa avec transport’, ‘he kissed it with transport’. Whilst current, the phrase appears uncharacteristically sterile in Williams, a poet acclaimed for her language of sensibility.

⁵⁰⁵ Sartarelli, Stephen, trans., *The Leper of the City of Aoste. Voyage Around My Room: Selected Works of Xavier de Maistre* (New York: New Directions Books, 1994), p. 177.

⁵⁰⁶ My trans.

mon cœur se serrer.’⁵⁰⁷ The literal, ‘I felt my heart tighten’ or the liberal, ‘I felt my heart breaking’ are both possible here, or even, ‘I felt a pang of anguish’.⁵⁰⁸ Williams is the more poetically wrought and its proximity to the ungainly phrase preceding demonstrates the transpositional dynamism vivifying the work.

Returning to Baudelaire, a further fragment from *Mon cœur mis à nu* provides apposite remarks with which to frame an analysis of Williams’s remarkable praxis:

Il y a dans tout changement quelque chose
D’infâme et d’agréable à la fois, quelque chose
Qui tient de l’infidélité et du
Déménagement. Cela suffit à expliquer
La révolution française.⁵⁰⁹

In every change there is something at once vile and agreeable: some element of disloyalty and restlessness. This sufficiently explains the French Revolution.⁵¹⁰

Williams was at once a faithful and a disloyal agent of change. Her translations of Maistre’s prose are often strange, conterminously ugly and beautiful. In its singular embodiment of multi-directional and liminal style, Williams’s *The Leper of the City of Aoste* represents a significant inclusion, not only to her literary corpus, but to the development of an understanding of Romantic translation practice, revealing as it does the complexities inherent in the motion from, towards, between, and across texts and cultures. The work is full of negotiations between light and dark often producing perplexing shades of grey. The result is fusion of influences representing a mediation of Anglo-French Romantic prospects *et cela suffit à expliquer l’oeuvre de Helen Maria Williams*.

⁵⁰⁷ Williams, *The Leper of the City of Aoste*, p. 39.; Maistre, p. 276.

⁵⁰⁸ My trans.; my trans.; Sartarelli, p. 177; *Collins-Robert French Dictionary (CRFD)* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1995). *Collins-Robert* gives several examples of usage of *serrer* and of *se serrer* in the context of Maistre’s phrase, none with the poetry of Williams.

⁵⁰⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Mon Cœur mis à nu*, édition établie par Claude Pichois (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2001), p. 7.

⁵¹⁰ Cameron, trans., *Charles Baudelaire: My Heart Laid Bare*, p.177.

Chapter 7

Revolutionary Memory and the Translation of Self: *Souvenirs de la Révolution française*

Writing in her postmodern autobiography, *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman describes the transitional process of migration between cultures and languages. The subtitle of the work, *A Life in a New Language*, could be regenerated to form a new title suitable to the life of Williams, who, after the move to France, enjoyed a *New Life in New Languages*. Hoffman's book constitutes an examination of what it means to transfer oneself, through language, into an alien context, to recontextualise oneself within the unfamiliar paradigms of the other. Williams's final published work, *Souvenirs de la Révolution française*, is a work which communicates the same ideas as those of Hoffman. The book itself is bibliographic evidence of Williams's assimilation into French cultural life and exemplifies the same theme of immersion and self-transformation. The spatial definition is also important. Williams exists very much *in* language(s). She is detectable somewhere within the field of linguistic and cultural convergence by which she is surrounded. She moves in and out of the occluded liminality of the middle ground, always mediating from somewhere in-between, from the space within. Moreover, the text is a complex central point of experience, influence and language.

Written in English by Williams (by now naturalised as French), the book was translated into French by Williams's nephew, Charles Coquerel. The work was then published in Paris and subsequently has only ever appeared in the French edition. Kennedy records that, whilst Williams 'had made plans to publish an English edition [...] [,] no English version has been discovered.'⁵¹¹ The *Souvenirs* is, then, a singularly significant component of Williams's translational oeuvre, as, as I will suggest, despite Coquerel's agency, Williams's voice is so

⁵¹¹ Kennedy, p. 210.

distinct in the work, and in the paratext of the preface, as to represent the final transfiguration of her *self* into an alternative dimension, never to return to her original form. As Hoffman argues, ‘there’s no returning to the point of origin, no regaining of childhood unity.

Experience creates style, and style, in turn, creates a new woman.⁵¹² Embodying a similar testament to that left by Hoffman, the *Souvenirs* is a profoundly reflective work of auto-analysis and self-translation and serves a fitting bookend to this study of her translatorial career. It is the locus from which we can extract the final evidence for the reinvention of the memory of Williams towards granting her an afterlife commensurate with the recognition of her broader contribution to our understanding of the Romantic period.

Hoffman writes:

It’s only when I retell my whole story, back to the beginning, and from the beginning onward, in one language, that I can reconcile the voices within me with each other; it is only then that the person who judges the voices and tells the stories begins to emerge.⁵¹³

In the *Souvenirs*, Williams adopts the same strategy. She returns, at the end, to the story from the beginning, her experience of the Revolution. In the final word, she harnesses the myriad tongues within into an expression through one voice in a single language, French and, in so doing is able to finally inscribe the revolutionary story for posterity. However, as Kennedy suggests, there were plans for an English edition. We can define the finality I have suggested above according to the fact that Williams, it seems, was stopped by elements outside of her control, time perhaps (frozen in time, the work, in French, becomes our testament to final transformation). But, with plans for the English work, Williams clearly intended a revision, a further reinterpretation of self which she was unable to perform. Describing a similar sense of limbo, Hoffman says of herself: ‘I’ve become caught between stories, between the kinds of

⁵¹² Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation* (London: Minerva, 1995), p. 273.

⁵¹³ Hoffman, p. 272.

story we tell ourselves about ourselves.’⁵¹⁴ Williams resided between narratives, but was not stuck. The suggestion of a complete transferral into a unified notion of ‘French’ is not sensible, for what does the notion of Frenchness really mean? For David Attridge, ‘[t]ranslation in the sense of complete transference from one language to another is impossible [...] for the same reason that identical repetition of any work is impossible; but translation as a process of always incomplete transfer of what is literary in a work is part and parcel of the singularity of literature.’⁵¹⁵ Williams’s was an incomplete transfer. We should resist the binary application of self-translation according to the movement from simplified categories, English to French. Rather, we should re-impose the notion of mediation, the third way which characterises her approach. The first half of her life was spent writing in England, the second part, her French afterlife, was characterised by interconnections, many stories were assimilated into her centrality. The stories she told about herself were invariably those of the Revolution and its aftermath and of her undying support for the cause of liberty. She mediated between these stories and, as we have seen, is often visible within a surrounding narrative, as her life was her art and *vice versa*. In relation to her translations, to paraphrase Spivak, Helen Maria Williams is also this collection of texts.⁵¹⁶

In part, we may suggest the idea of the translation of the self, in the case of Williams, by citing the evidence of her having been granted French citizenship in 1817. Following this naturalisation her identity, as least in a bureaucratic sense, was officially French. We should resist simplification again, however, as the immigrant’s desire to assume the nationality of the country of residence may be attributed to many reasons. Ease of movement, familial assimilation into local authority structures, tax compliance; any number of reasons may be applicable to the idea. In the case of Williams, however, regardless of the underlying reasons

⁵¹⁴ Hoffman, p. 268.

⁵¹⁵ Attridge, p. 73.

⁵¹⁶ ‘Jacques Derrida is also this collection of texts’, Spivak, in *Of Grammatology*, p. ix.

for the change, the conversion is representative of Williams's lifelong commitment to embracing the other. In a sense, the Romantic translation practice of bringing the reader closer to the author is personified in Williams's movement towards the other in her naturalisation.

In the strict sense of the term, self-translation, or auto-translation, describes, according to Bassnett, a 'growing phenomenon [...] where writers work in more than one language and translate their own work.'⁵¹⁷ A frequently-cited example of the practice is Beckett's self-translation of *En Attendant Godot* into *Waiting for Godot*, from French to English, and the reverse practice in his novel, *Murphy* from English to French. We can suggest the *Souvenirs* as an example of self-translation, in this light, if we accept the notion of Williams's presence as the translator, despite Coquerel's name on the title page. Her proximity to centrality of the transfer is such that it would seem almost to negate Coquerel's contribution entirely. Almost, but not quite. The reinforcement of distance is always important to Williams, the objective/subjective paradox seems always in play. In relation to Williams's visibility in the *Letters from France*, Favret establishes her focus on the form of the *Letters*, rather than on the author, in order to 'show that we cannot easily locate or identify the woman within them.'⁵¹⁸ The *Souvenirs* is a further example of a work in which, at times it is not always easily to locate Williams. Again, she is at once present and absent (the third agency of Coquerel establishes distance). The strategy is used consistently by Williams and is employed in the final work, so that, according to Favret, 'from a perspective located on the edge [...] she reads for us what may be called the *letter de cachet*: the "hidden" correspondence between authorizing institutions and epistolary functions.'⁵¹⁹ Williams reads her own story of the revolution in the *Souvenirs* with the intention of illuminating the unseen, but the

⁵¹⁷ Bassnett, *Translation*, p. 7.

⁵¹⁸ Favret, p. 55.

⁵¹⁹ Favret, p. 55.

mediation of the third party of Coquerel offers some, if nominal, dimension of distance from which she can operate and move.

Similar to the three-part paradigms posited by Steiner and Grieder, Rainer Grutman describes three categories of self-translation, the third of which comprises immigrant writers who reinvent themselves in the language of their adoptive country.⁵²⁰ In her final work, Williams becomes resident in the final category, having been already naturalised within the paradigm of Grieder's third stage of Anglomania and performing the reinvention within the framework suggested above. As with all of Williams's work in translation, the process is perplexing and nebulous. As Bassnett affirms, '[u]nderstanding what happens in self-translation is complex, since [...] there are factors linked to an individual writer's own creativity, which may develop differently as he or she moves between languages.'⁵²¹ As we have seen, building an understanding of what happens in any of Williams's translations is complex as she is continuously moving between, travelling through texts, languages and cultures. Her own creativity is always to the fore and in the *Souvenirs* she creates, moreover recreates, her own and the revolutionary stories. The work represents the ultimate adoption of revolutionary language and confirms her liberation as a political woman writer in a life devoted to self-emancipation and progressive universalism.

'Why,' asks Rainer Grutman, 'do some writers repeat in a second language what has already been said in their previous work?'⁵²² Why indeed? In answer to this we might suggest the prosaic necessity of translating in order to get the book published (finding an English publisher may have proved difficult). However, as is the case in much of Williams's work in translation, there is more to the process than pragmatism alone. As Grutman argues, 'apart

⁵²⁰ See Rainer Grutman, 'A Sociological Glance at Self-Translation and Self-Translators', in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, ed by Anthony Cordingley (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁵²¹ Bassnett, p. 163.

⁵²² Grutman, 'Auto-Translation', in Baker, ed., p. 18.

from material conditions [...] there must be some ulterior motive that helps writers to overcome their initial reluctance.’⁵²³ The answer could be that Williams, in the *Souvenirs*, leaves her final version of the story to futurity and, as we have said, leaves it in the language of the revolution, a final act of self-immersion within the milieu she had for so long felt at home, the nation for whom she had felt so much hope and from whom she believed would spring the political and cultural change to which she remained so committed. Williams’s ulterior motive was the one which was always her true *skopos*: that of transmitting the narrative of the originating revolutionary ideals, by which she had been forever transformed on her first visit in 1790.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the work is introduced with Coquerel’s ‘Avertissement’. It was suggested, in the note concerning the hermeneutic potential of the noun, that the Foreword may contain a warning. Favret provides useful commentary from which we can extend a discussion regarding Williams’s self-positioning. Again, regarding the *Letters*, Favret writes:

An Englishwoman in France, Helen Maria Williams becomes part of the spectacle. She herself is “staged” in these early letters: once by the genre itself, once again by her political position. After all, the letters do place her in the right place at the right moment in history. That position is dangerous: Williams invites the censorious scrutiny of her British audience as well as the suspicions of the French government. The challenge her letters face, then, is to represent for her readers the spectacular events which determine her life, while removing herself from the dangerous spotlight of notoriety.⁵²⁴

Ever the artist, Williams indeed stages herself within this work and she shows that she was in the right place at the right time. The position was still dangerous, even by 1827, with regard to the ‘censorious scrutiny’ of British critics. By this time, however, it is unlikely Williams was overly concerned with critical reception. In the *Souvenirs*, Williams manages the

⁵²³ Grutman, in Baker, ed., p. 18.

⁵²⁴ Favret, p. 62.

impossible task of removing herself and imposing herself on the book as a historical document and on the imprinting of the story of the ‘spectacular events which determine her life’ That she achieves this is testament to her skill at operating within the bounds of the mysterious, from the realms of the paradoxical and uncertain. In this, she becomes the Romantic translator *nonpareil*.

The prefatory remarks made by Coquerel/Williams are suitably eulogistic in tone. Fitting praise for his aunt, who was later described by his brother, Athanase as ‘justly bear[ing] the title of *English Historian of the Revolution*.’⁵²⁵ If, as we might suspect, the words come from Williams herself, then the text once again shows signs of the *skopos-aequivocus* we have previously encountered. Certainly, if we suggest the overlaying of Coquerel, we can posit the continued skilful use of dissembling modesty. The Foreword states the following:

S’étant jetée de bonne heure, par volonté et par enthousiasme, au milieu des orages de notre révolution, en ayant embrassé les principes avec toute la ferveur du patriotisme d’une femme, elle a été spectatrice de ce qui s’est passé; elle s’est liée avec les acteurs principaux de ces grands jours.

Having thrown herself at just the right moment, by her own will and enthusiasm, into the centre of the storms of our revolution, in having embraced the principles with all fervour of the patriotism of a woman, she was the spectator of that which passed; she bound herself to the principal actors of those great days.⁵²⁶

Can we discern Williams’s voice here, faintly audible in the characteristic style of revolutionary patriot? There is certainly the trace of Williams in the evocation of those great days. If so, the device of assumed distance is well-used. The use of Coquerel, speaking in the third person allows for the self-imposition onto the scene of the glorious days of the revolution, whilst at the same time maintaining a humility through the third-party’s eulogy.

⁵²⁵ Athanase Coquerel, Preface to *Christianity: Its Perfect Adaptation to the Mental, Moral, and Spiritual Nature of Man*, trans. by Rev. D. Davison (London: Longman, 1847), p. viii.; my trans.

⁵²⁶ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. vi.

This is a version of the *modesty topos* put to unusual use. The trope is most visible in the next section of the piece. Coquerel continues:

Dès-lors il est instructif pour nous de l'entendre nous raconteur ce qu'elle a vu. C'est un témoin de plus dans l'enquête de la postérité. Son livre est un simple récit, où les choses et les hommes sont jugés avec la sensibilité franche et naïve d'une femme, qui, plus sage que beaucoup d'hommes, a vu de près les abus de la liberté et les mutations des Français, sans conclure que la liberté est une mauvaise chose, et que nous en sommes indignes.

Consequently, it is instructive for us to hear recounted for us that we she saw. It is one more testimony in the enquiry of posterity. Her book is a simple account, in which things and men are judged with the frank and innocent sensibility of a woman, who, wiser than many men, saw from up close the abuses of liberty and the mutations of the French, without concluding that liberty is a bad thing, and that we are unworthy of it.⁵²⁷

Williams disappears momentarily here, perhaps, but again the phraseology and the tone seem to suggest the sound of her voice. Most telling is the description of the work as a mere bagatelle, the *simple récit*, *récit* being a difficult word to translate nestling somewhere between a novelette, an essay and account. The dismissal of the work as a trifle is indicative of a Williamsian trope of modesty with which she can claim the innocence of a woman, but immediately assert her sagacity compared to many of her male contemporaries. She sees as much a man, but is equipped with a heightened sensibility and a keen and true sense of the meaning of liberty, furthermore that the revolutionary sympathisers, despite the corruption and confusion remained worthy of it. A powerful judgement given by a powerful, hidden authority.

The concept of the work as a finality, a centrality of previous incarnations and of previous renditions is confirmed by Coquerel with his closing remarks on the work. 'L'auteur', 'the author', he begins, 'a publié une série d'ouvrages sur les principales époques de la revolution [...] et le livre que j'offre aujourd'hui au public, me paraît renfermer l'ensemble de ses

⁵²⁷ Coquerel, p. vi.; my trans.

souvenirs.’ ‘Has published a series of works on the most important periods of the revolution [...] and the book which I today offer to the public, appears to me the whole combination of her memoirs.’ (my trans.)⁵²⁸ The work is, indeed, the final piece in Williams’s project, the work which she had begun, by her will and enthusiasm, from the beginning of her second life in France.

In the final words of the preface, the identities of Williams and Coquerel become merged, the distinction between the two is difficult to discern as the text produces a synthesis of voices though the evocation of one speaking of, and yet at the same time, through the other. Coquerel reinscribes his own voice, aroused into expression by the force of Williams’s own. He writes:

[J]e dois ajouter que, quel que fût mon désir de faire connaître cet ouvrage au public, je ne l’eusse point traduit, si je n’avais trouvé dans cette esquisse historique une certaine analogie entre les opinions de l’écrivain et les miennes, et surtout un respect décidé pour ces droits glorieux que la révolution française a proclamés à l’univers. On a beaucoup recommandé aux auteurs d’écrire avec conscience; j’ose réclamer la même vertu pour les traducteurs.

I must add that, whatever had been my desire to make this work known to the public, I would not have translated it, if I had not found in this historical sketch a certain analogy between the writer’s opinions and my own, and above all a determined respect for those glorious rights which the French revolution has proclaimed to the universe. We have often recommended to authors to write with conscience, I dare to claim the same virtue for translators.⁵²⁹

By dissecting this section of the Foreword we can extract the Williams-isms from it and strengthen, if not finalise, the case for her presence within, and also between. She is, here, very much *entre-texte(s)*. Firstly, there is reestablishment of the insignificance trope. The desire to make the text known, on the part of the translator is of secondary importance to the necessity of the text’s translation. Paradoxically, the work may be a slight piece (implied by the tone of flippancy as to the reasons to publish), but it demands translation and

⁵²⁸ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, pp. vi-vii.

⁵²⁹ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. vii.; my trans.

transmission. Importantly again, it demands transmission through translation. The translator must translate. According to Attridge, ‘the singular work is not merely *available* for translation but is *constituted* in what may be thought of as an unending set of translations – for each new context in which it appears produces a further transformation.’⁵³⁰ This work is not only available to Coquerel, but urges its own transformation, and is therefore constituted by this translation, through the stated affinities between author and translator. The analogy is circular in form and movement, as the opinions are Williams’s, are Coquerels, then are again Williams’s; all the time the relationship is revolving in an eternal movement of self-referential circularity. ‘Nous sommes encore trop près du volcan’, ‘we are still too close to the volcano’, Coquerel claims at one point (regarding temporal distance to the revolution).⁵³¹ The same phrase applies to his translatorial inter-relationship with Williams. Williams is present in the text, here, in the continual interaction of interconnected texts, her *self*, her text and the text of her translator and the translated text.

As well as representing a call for translators, as a class of writers, to work conscientiously, and as much as it is a plea from Coquerel to be considered fairly according to his worthy intentions and honest execution, the final claim of the piece is a cry from Williams that, having always been a writer of conscience, she be received as a translator who has always performed the task with an overriding sense of duty, with compassion and with a conviction that she has served a righteous cause. The translation of the Revolution is a virtuous calling and one for which she has always strived to express, with prudence and integrity, the most noble truth.

Grutman poses a question useful to this discussion. ‘How,’ he asks, ‘does a self-translation relate as a *text* to “normal” translations? Can it be said to possess its own distinctive

⁵³⁰ Attridge, p. 73.

⁵³¹ Coquerel, *Souvenirs*, p. vi.

character?’⁵³² The question is worth asking in relation to this analysis. How *does* the *Souvenirs* relate to Williams’s other translations and does it have its own character? I believe the relationship the work has to the other works in the corpus is defined largely in Coquerel’s assertion that the book represents an entirety, a synoptic whole made up of all those instances of revolutionary and intercultural expression based on experience which comprise the translation oeuvre and, indeed, Williams’s French canon, if we can call it that. In this it is the final translation of all those before. Its singular character arises from the placement of Williams’s voice speaking in the originating revolutionary language, both in translation and naturally, untranslated. The paradox is ever-present and it is this mystery which suffuses the work.

She begins with a characteristic self-positioning. She stages herself, thereby securing her credentials as revolutionary witness, saying the following:

Durant le cours de la revolution française, qui s’est passé sous mes yeux, j’ai plusieurs fois risqué d’écrire l’histoire de quelques parties détachées de ses annales.

During the course of the French Revolution, which passed before my eyes, I risked many times writing the history of some parties removed from its annals.⁵³³

In reminding us of her courage in writing about those players outside of the usual revolutionary *dramatis personae*, Williams praises herself and suggests her access to reconдите knowledge. She also reinforces her agency in the (re)creation of the revolutionary narrative. She has written characters back in to the drama and will continue to do so. Having set herself up, she makes a declaration of intent in which she discusses her desire to communicate the general opinion of those parties as she has understood it. She later reinscribes the importance of the work as an important historical document. The tone is, as

⁵³² Grutman, in Baker, ed., p. 19.

⁵³³ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 1.; my trans.

often with Williams, self-effacing, but duplicitous. She at once dismisses her contribution whilst, at the same time, signalling it. She comments that:

On pourra croire que peut-être que je ne publie le compte rendu de mes opinions sur les divers événemens de la revolution française, que pour saisir un prétexte de donner mes Mémoires.

It may be believed that maybe I have only published the account of my opinions of the diverse events of the French Revolution, only to seize upon a pretext to impart my memoirs.⁵³⁴

Of course, nothing could be further than the truth, as:

Un degré d'intérêt bien plus élevé et, il faut le dire, bien plus raisonnable, s'attache aux écrits de ceux qui ont vécu dans des temps extraordinaires, au milieu de circonstances inouïes.

A far more elevated and, it must be said, far more sensible degree of interest is attached to the writings of those who have lived in extraordinary times, in the middle of unprecedented circumstances.⁵³⁵

She follows the setting of scene in the book's first few lines, however, with an admission that she feels it her duty to produce the work, above all, 'pour une raison d'un tout autre genre.'

'for a reason of a different kind, altogether.'⁵³⁶ Most important of all, she announces the following:

Je dois repousser une accusation dirigée contre moi par quelques écrivains de l'Angleterre, qui trouvent que j'ai changé d'opinion pendant les dernières années, et qui, pour tout dire, m'ont déclarée dûment convaincue d'une apostasie en politique. Mon devoir, comme mon desir est de les refuter.

I must refute an accusation directed against me by some writers from England, who find that I have changed my opinion during the last few years, and who, in fact, have declared me duly persuaded of a political apostasy.⁵³⁷

This is more than she can bear: the challenge to her revolutionary creed is one thing, but the accusation of treason is insufferable. She continues:

⁵³⁴ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 4; my trans.

⁵³⁵ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p.5.; my trans.

⁵³⁶ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 1.; my trans.

⁵³⁷ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 1.; my trans.

Des rapproches, quelques fondés qu'ils fussent, partis des journaux de l'opinion anglaise hostile à la France, c'est-à-dire à la nation française, m'auraient peu touché; je pardonne volontiers quand on m'accuse d'avoir défendu la révolution, mais je ne puis pardonner quand on m'accuse de l'avoir trahie.

The reproaches, founded on whatever basis, coming from newspapers of English opinion hostile to France, that is to say to the French nation, have hardly troubled me; I forgive readily when I am accused having defended the revolution, but I cannot forgive when I am accused of having betrayed it.⁵³⁸

This is the worst calumny for Williams. There is no greater crime of which she could be accused. The revolution for Williams holds an almost religious significance as the use of the term, *apostasie*, makes clear. She speaks later in the same tone of the catalyst of her conversion:

Entraînée dès ma jeunesse au milieu des grands événements de la révolution français, ses principes sacrés devinrent mon culte et mon idole. Chez ceux qui sentent vivement les principes, les principes deviennent des passions.

Embroided since my youth at the centre of the great events of the French Revolution, its sacred principles became my cult and my idol. Among those who feel principles keenly, principles become passions.⁵³⁹

Having been converted as a young woman, she admits to worshipping the revolution's ideals, the passion for which she never lost. As a defender of liberty she makes no apology, but she feels keenly that she must not be remembered as a traitor to those ideals. She reveals her concern with her afterlife in characteristically dissembling style, commenting that, 'Si par hazard on se souvient de moi dans l'avenir, je l'ai assez chèrement payé.' 'If by chance I am remembered in the future, I have paid for it well.'⁵⁴⁰ The register changes in one sentence (the push and pull of Williams's style) from the disinterested speculation of her future memory to the definitive marking of her possession of her experience. The tonal shift, a textual Doppler effect is marked in the contrast of her description of 'ce petit ouvrage', 'this small work', consisting of her writings described as, 'que des notes détachées et éparses,'

⁵³⁸ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 1.; my trans.

⁵³⁹ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 3.; my trans.

⁵⁴⁰ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 1.; my trans.

‘just disconnected and scattered notes’⁵⁴¹ and the full rhetorical thrust which she gives to the description of the milieu her petty notes record:

Pourrais-je dire quelle fut cette tempête, si je n’en avais traversé les horreurs. Le trait spécial des temps dits révolutionnaires, c’est l’intime liaison ou plutôt le rapport imminent qu’ils créent entre les affaires publiques et les sorts privés. [...] tout se traite brusquement et par violence, la discussion du jour amène une catastrophe le lendemain même, et tandis que les spectateurs regardent venir la tempête, déjà elle écalte autour d’eux.

Could I tell you of this tempest, if I had not traversed its horrors. The exceptional feature of the times known as revolutionary is the intimate liaison, or rather the imminent rapport they create between public affairs and private fortunes. [...] Everything is done quickly and with violence, the debate of the day brings a catastrophe the very next day, and while the spectators watch the coming of the storm, it has already exploded around them.⁵⁴²

The work is the summation of Williams’s revolutionary experiences and, in spite of her continued claims to the contrary, it is an accomplished piece of detailed and politically astute commentary. She discusses in depth the political history of the period with great attention to specificity of language in describing people and places, and in discussing debates and technical issues of governance and political interaction. She also recounts the history of her dealings with and sentiments toward Napoleon so as to reinscribe this particular narrative. The book is her lasting testament to posterity and gains an almost sacred aspect in its configuration as such.

If she is to be remembered, then, it will not be *par hasard*, by chance. She hopes always to be remembered as the purist revolutionary evangelist, spreading the holy word of universal liberty into the afterlife. That she affords herself such powers shows the degree of confidence and self-belief for which a woman would be severely criticised. Hence, the *modesty topos* in all her translations. In this final work she allows herself the freedom to express more fully her (self) worship. In the final words of the opening chapter, Williams self-translates, with the

⁵⁴¹ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 3.; my trans.

⁵⁴² Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 4.; my trans.

common trope of duality, her notions of self and of fellowship, reasoning the latter as having precedence over the former. However, the work as a whole and her self-imposition in much of the translation work throws a note of caution, a slight sense of doubt as to authorial intention and reception. It is with a Janus face that she once again works and by the time of this final work, she is master of the rhetorical paradox. She writes that:

Une revolution guérit radicalement l'égoïsme. Quand on voit tous les jours la société entiere s'enbraler et ses fondemens mêmes se détruire, c'est alors que le *moi* sent bien toute sa petitesse. Alors on n'exagère pas ce qu'on souffre personnellement; au contraire, on apprend à souffrir, et on apprend à retenir la plainte.

A revolution radically cures selfishness. When we see every day the entire society shaking itself and even destroying its own foundations, that is when the *me* really feels all its smallness. So we do not exaggerate that we suffer personally; on the contrary, we learn to suffer, and we learn to hold back our complaints.⁵⁴³

If we retranslate Williams's *egoïsme* into egotism, the sketch is shaded slightly differently.

There is no doubt that she felt a sharp sense of fellowship. After all, I have consistently argued the case for her universalism. However, it can be argued that the revolution furnished her with the increasing self-assuredness with which she told her story. Rather than having been relieved of her ego, she was enabled by the revolution to realise a version of herself equipped with self-knowledge and confidence. She became a great writer, and a great translator, through her proximity to, and assimilation of, revolutionary history.

The final chapter of the *Souvenirs* marks the final definition by Williams of her liminal self. Having, since arriving in France, learnt to harness the potential of mystery and paradox, she employs all the skills of mediation to navigate a course between the two nations of England and France and in doing so stakes her claim on the middle ground for perpetuity. Williams writes:

⁵⁴³ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 6.; my trans.

La France et l'Angleterre, où tous les bons esprits sont alliés, parcourront ensemble cette carrière glorieuse où l'Angleterre s'est acquis tant de renom. L'Angleterre, cette île natale qui me sera toujours si chère, et à laquelle je suis fière d'appartenir. La France aussi, avec l'aide de ces institutions libres qu'elle a payées du prix d'une révolution, s'avancera rapidement et se reposera dans la liberté. Tel est le vœu de tous les amis de la dignité humaine, et surtout d'une personne attaché comme moi à cette France, par tous les souvenirs d'une longue habitation, par la mémoire des calamités publiques dont j'ai eu ma part, et des malheurs privés dont je n'ai pas été exempté; ce pays où tout me retrace les images des temps qui ne sont plus, où je passerai le peu d'années de la vie qui me reste, et auquel je demanderai enfin l'hospitalité d'un tombeau.

France and England, where all great minds are allies, continue together this glorious career, in which England has gained herself so much renown; England, this native island which I still hold so dear, and of which I am proud to belong. France also, with the aid of her free institutions for which she paid the price of a revolution. Such is the wish of all the friends of human dignity, and above all of a person attached as I am to this France, by all the souvenirs of a long residence, by the memory of public calamities in which I had my part, and the private sufferings from which I was not exempt; this country where everything represents for me images of times which are no more, where I will pass the remaining few years of life which are left to me, et from which I will ask finally for the hospitality of a tomb.⁵⁴⁴

The glorious career in which the two nations are bound is the journey towards liberty. The concepts of England and France are also eternally bound in the centrality of Williams. She feels the pull of both nations and maintains an equal depth of feeling for both. Tellingly, however, she finalises herself in France, where she will ask for a final resting place (actually a tomb, Williams's egotism shows itself momentarily again here). Thus, at the end of her life, with few years left to live, Williams subsumes herself into the other, but before doing so declares her affinity with the obverse side of the geo-political, cultural coin, thus mediating to the last, even into her grave.

⁵⁴⁴ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 201.; my trans.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Chateaubriand provides the words with which to begin the closing comment of this thesis:

Un traducteur n'a droit à aucune gloire; il faut seulement qu'il montre qu'il a été patient, docile et laborieux.

A translator has no right to any single glory; he must show only that he has been patient, meek and industrious.⁵⁴⁵

We may doubt whether Williams ever showed herself to be meek, humble or obedient, not with any conviction at least, as the chapter on prefaces discussed.⁵⁴⁶ We might say she was patient. We can certainly say that she was industrious. Every translation was the result of strenuous effort, both intellectually, in the interpretive process, and in terms of the difficulties at hand surrounding her engagement with each text and the resulting regenerative productions. What I should most like to suggest is the reversal of Chateaubriand's, in fact, of history's denial of the translator's recognition and accord Williams with all the glory befitting of such a truly remarkable Romantic translator.

But, to paraphrase Spivak, why must we worry over so simple a thing as translation?⁵⁴⁷ In the first instance we should say that we must concern ourselves with translation as, far from being simple, the idea is a complex, abstract concept, comprising paradoxical dependencies and multifarious relationships. In an increasingly globalised environment where communication grows daily in an increasingly international and multitudinous network of trans-lingual and trans-cultural transmissions, translation is vital. It is the means by which we are assured psychological access to the other and it can therefore rightly be seen, as David

⁵⁴⁵ François-René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Paradis Perdu*, Vol. I, p. xxviii.

⁵⁴⁶ Hermeneutic potentials for Chateaubriand's *docile*. The uncertainty of translation, once again, becomes clear.

⁵⁴⁷ 'Why must we worry over so simple a thing as preface-making?', Spivak, in *Of Grammatology*, p. xiii.

Bellos claims, as ‘another name for the human condition.’⁵⁴⁸ The continued examination of the intricately fused dynamics of the process is fundamental to our continued understanding of each other.

Scholarly interest in translation grows apace as does the contemporary motion towards the establishment of science as the last word in the discourse of truth. Writing at the end of the last century, Roy Porter argued that, ‘as it moves towards into the twenty-first century, Western civilization still subscribes to – or rather [...] remains imprisoned with – this secular vision of the limitless human drive towards economic growth, scientific innovation, and progress.’⁵⁴⁹ Little has changed. In a socio-cultural environment which values utility over art, the space grows ever smaller from which to explore less empirically-centred discourse. According to Porter, the *philosophes* bequeathed to us a ‘*scientific myth*’, the influence of which is seemingly all pervasive.⁵⁵⁰ It is here that I should like to reclaim the importance of the study of literature and translation and to argue for the acceptance of a realm of undecidability, of negative capability, in short of paradox and mystery. In doing so, I shall invoke the largest of Williams’s translation projects and the one which, it may seem, is unusual for its absence here. However, as I have stated, the translations of Humboldt merit a separate study and do not fit the remit of this thesis as I have defined it, in terms of the relationship to the Paris translations as providing the evidence for Williams’s revolutionary project.

The contribution of Darwin to scientific discourse (in fact to the broader sphere of contemporary cultural discourse) cannot be overstated. Darwin cited Alexander von Humboldt as a guiding influence in his formative years as a fledgling scientist, it was his reading of Humboldt which furnished him with the desire to undertake his own voyage to

⁵⁴⁸ Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, p. 338.

⁵⁴⁹ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), p. 19.

⁵⁵⁰ Porter, p. 19.

study the natural world in distant places. It was Williams's translation of Humboldt's *Relation historique du voyage aux regions équinoxiales du nouveau continent*, her *Personal Narrative* which accompanied Darwin on his first voyage as naturalist on the H.M.S. Beagle (1831-1836), a gift from Darwin's friend and teacher, John Stevens Henslow, Professor of Botany at Cambridge. Darwin 'idolised Humboldt' and consulted the work continuously, according to *Darwin Online* the *Personal Narrative* 'served as the model for his own *Beagle Diary*, which with the addition of material from his scientific diaries became his published *Journal of Researches* (1839).'⁵⁵¹ We can therefore trace a direct link from Williams to Darwin. It was her mediation which allowed Darwin access to Humboldt and his work. However, as we have seen, Williams was not a copyist. She was an experimental and creative force in the process. She left the same traces of her presence on the afterlife of the Humboldt text. According to *Darwin Online*, 'Jason Wilson's recent Penguin translation is "plainer" than Helen Maria Williams's, though at least engaging for modern reader. Wilson, in his introduction shows that Humboldt's French was less flowery than early nineteenth century readers, including Darwin and his family, were led to believe.'⁵⁵² Williams's agency is obvious. She reinvigorated Humboldt's prose using all the rhetorical skill she employed elsewhere. This raises a question. Was Darwin reading Humboldt or Williams? He cannot strictly be said to have been engaging with Humboldt first-hand, he was always mediated by Williams, who reinterpreted and reanimated the original. In a sense, then, all the influence brought to bear and all of the subsequent scientific certainty in developments following Darwin with all the definitiveness as to originating truth can be said to have their base in the liminal, mysterious space of doubt and uncertainty. This leaves the space for an argument as to the consideration of the study of translation (as a form of art) as of equal value to the study of utilitarian disciplines. Bellos says that, 'it is translation, more than speech itself, which

⁵⁵¹ 'Humboldt's *Personal narrative* and its influence on Darwin', from *Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/EditorialIntroductions/Chancellor_Humboldt.html> [accessed 22/12/15]

⁵⁵² *Darwin Online*.

provides incontrovertible evidence of the human capacity to think and to communicate thought. We should do more of it.’⁵⁵³ As a corollary, it is the study of translation which provides us with the evidence to understand these communications. We should, indeed, do more of it.

This thesis contributes to the growing canon of studies of individual translators. Specifically, by undertaking an extensive study of the Parisian translations of Helen Maria Williams the evidence is provided, firstly for the argument for greater consideration for Williams among the list of canonical Romantic writers but, perhaps more importantly we can say that, by highlighting the contribution of women writers such as Williams, challenges can be made in the continuing work towards literary gender equality, which will inform the wider discourse of societal gender issues. Williams has reminded us that translation is a complicated and multifaceted concept, no longer analogous with the mechanical transcription of ‘proper’ women’s writing or appropriate women’s work. She has certainly left her trace for posterity. Her voice is being heard, but we must listen harder, for, whilst the canon of Romantic women writers has grown, her place in it thus far has been restricted to understanding her position as revolutionary historian through analysis of the *Letters*. By understanding the contribution she made to literature, history and politics in her work in translation, we gain insight into the period and into our own contemporary responses to it.

Over the course of the preceding chapters we have seen how Helen Maria Williams understood translation for herself and how she practiced what she saw as her purpose. At the beginning of the thesis, three questions were posed:

- 1) How does translation function as both creative agency of interpretation of the French Revolution of 1789 and of French literature in the post-revolutionary and Napoleonic eras?

⁵⁵³ Bellos, p. 353.

- 2) How are the works of Helen Maria Williams in Anglo-French translation situated within this literary-philosophical context?
- 3) How does the work of Williams contribute to the emergent European discourse concerning translation theory developing in the 1790s and on into the beginning of the nineteenth century?

In answer to the first question, Williams herself provides a suitable response in the *Souvenirs*, when she claims that whilst her writings are only scraps, notes at best, they form part of the ‘plus majestueux volume’, ‘the most majestic volume.’ (Fr.)⁵⁵⁴ Williams configured her entire career in translation towards the interpretation and regeneration of the revolution of 1789. The reception of the collective communications of experience formed the majestic volume: the history of the revolution transmitted into the future. This was a creative project, Williams fashioned both herself and her revolutionary narrative over time. Translation served several purposes within this framework. It allowed her, as we have seen in several prefaces, the capacity for psychological escape. She often found it helpful to journey from the turmoil of daily life in Paris into the realms of alterity, through immersion in different languages, stories, philosophies and political cultures. The subsequent transfiguration of texts (taking the term in its broadest context) allowed the transmission of ideas across socio-political divides. She was able to do this as she mediated, by her creative agency in the process, a complex series of influences and relationships. She claimed the middle ground and maintained it until her death and it was from here that she undertook the self-appointed mission to promote those ideas by which she had been most affected on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. From this time on, she was always reinterpreting the revolution, not only the initial event but, applying her skill at assimilation of influence, to communicating her experiences, having been profoundly affected by its repercussions over the following thirty eight years.

⁵⁵⁴ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 3.

In answer to the second question, in the preceding chapters I have argued for the rediscovery of Williams as a Romantic translator. The continuous use of modes of duality, the expression of the obverse, of antonymic concepts and relationships, the experimentation with paradox and most importantly the motion towards liberty prove Williams's Romantic mode of expression. 'La marche de peuples modernes,' 'the march of modern nations,' she writes, 'se dirige vers la liberté,' 'is moving toward liberty', 'et par conséquent vers le bonheur,' 'and consequently toward happiness.'⁵⁵⁵ Williams's belief in liberty extended to her translation practice and was perhaps an extension of it. From the first example of *Paul and Virginia* she exercises her method of controlled liberation. She remains bound to the source text, but in the case of *Paul and Virginia* performs a remarkable selection of additions and omissions, imposing herself on the text from the start. She developed her sense of experimental translation in *The Correspondence* where the imposition of the paratextual material of her observations on each letter represents increased confidence in her own voice.

Her confidence was shattered, of course, following the disasters surrounding the publication. She tentatively re-entered the literary life by beginning the Humboldt translations which, proving successful gave her some impetus to reclaim her base and recommence her work. The translation of Maistre's *Leper of the City of Aoste* represents the exemplary instance of her fully realised translation strategy, the ubiquitous push and pull of the work showing a marked expertise in the management of the transaction. The work, along with *Paul and Virginia* also provides the evidence of omni-directional intertextualities with Wordsworth, thereby further supporting the argument for Williams as mediator of pan-European Romanticisms. The final work, the *Souvenirs*, is the text which shows the combined facets of Williams's experience and rhetorical skill coalescing in the ultimate expression of her translation of the revolution and of her *self*.

⁵⁵⁵ Williams, *Souvenirs*, p. 200.

The idea of liberty had been indelibly marked on Williams by her experience at the *Fête de la Fédération*. Subsequently, through acquaintance with people and politics in Paris, she became conscious of political, linguistic and cultural dimensions to which she was hitherto blind. Not only did she learn the ideas which would fuel her devotion to the revolutionary cause but, through her salon, became acquainted with proto-German thought, particularly with regard to literature and translation. Experimenting with translational movement and visibility, Williams assimilated various discourses into her centrality and the translations are the expressions of that nexus.

Williams's familiarity with German thought leads us into answering the third, and final, question posed at the beginning of this thesis. The Romantic period was the well-spring from which emerged much of the theoretic innovation with which translation studies is still concerned today. Largely coming from the pre-unification German states, developments in translation theory at this time have been argued by many critics to have been fundamental in the development of all subsequent Western translation theory. The work most often cited as the key text from this time is Schleiermacher's *On the Different Methods of Translating*, a work which addresses the hermeneutic motion: bringing the reader towards the author, in this case. Williams's contribution to theory at this time is to operate from within the binary paradigm, but to navigate a third way. Whilst she does not make any claims to theorizing for herself, the prefaces show the constant interplay between stated purpose and hidden purpose, between movement towards and away from the *other*, and between trans-cultural influences. Her practice was her theory. Her overriding theoretical argument being that translation is the means of expressing potential alterity. She translated not just what was, but what could be.

According to Eliot Weinberger,

[t]ranslation is an utterly unique genre, but for some reason there is a perennial tendency to explain it by analogy. A translator is like an actor playing a role, a

musician performing a score, a messenger who sometimes garbles the message. But translation is such a familiar and intrinsic part of almost any culture that one wonders why there is this need to resort to analogies: we do not say that baking is like playing the violin.⁵⁵⁶

I include the quotation for two reasons. The first is that it provides support for my argument that translation is not a secondary activity. It is not the poor relation of *proper* literature and we should challenge such time-worn views of the genre within wider literary studies. We should no longer speak of Williams's translations as an aside, commenting only that it was through this work she made a living from Paris. Translation was a fundamental constituent of Williams's Romantic expression, in fact it is the place from which she produces her most Romantic work. She belongs to a rare caste of Romantic Women Translators and deserves to be celebrated as such.

The final reason for the inclusion of Weinberger's argument relates to the metaphors of translation. Unlike Weinberger, I have little problem with the ascription of the language of travel, for example, to Williams, as she was indeed a traveller. She was also a traveller in a more abstract sense. She ventured across languages and cultures. In terms of figurative comparisons, I have gone further and suggested that Williams was the personification of several concepts. Most importantly, I believe she was the revolutionary *theoros*, travelling so that she might see and recounting her experience so that we might glimpse alternate possibilities. Even that of which we think we are certain is subject to reinterpretation and reinvention. After all, what is a translator if not a visitor who has already seen and wishes to rediscover and retell? I leave the last word on the subject to Williams:

It were erroneous to believe, that countries, because they have already been visited, are therefore known. A penetrating and capacious mind finds every where new materials for observation.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ Eliot Weinberger, 'Anonymous Sources (*On Translators and Translating*)', in *In Translation: Translators and Their Work and What It Means* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 25.

⁵⁵⁷ Williams, *Personal Narrative*, p. viii.

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